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Jack Straw
W. Somerset Maugham



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JACK STRAW

A FARCE

In Three Acts

By W. S. MAUGHAM

LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN
MCM.XII

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This play was produced at the Vaudeville Theatre
on March 26, 1908, with the following cast :

JACK STRAW	CHARLES HAWTREY
COUNT VON BREMER	H. R. HIGNETT
MARQUESS OF SERLO	LOUIS GOODRICH
REV. LEWIS ABBOTT	CHARLES TROODE
AMBROSE HOLLAND	EDMUND MAURICE
MR. PARKER-JENNINGS	ROBERT WHYTE, JUNR.
VINCENT PARKER-JENNINGS	PERCY R. GOODYER
HEAD WAITER	VINCENT ERNE
SERVANT	NORMAN WRIGHTON
LADY WANLEY	VANE FEATHERSTONE
ETHEL PARKER-JENNINGS	DAGMAR WIEHE
ROSIE ABBOTT	MONA HARRISON
MRS. WITHERS	JOY CHATWYN
MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS	LOTTIE VENNE

JACK STRAW

CHARACTERS

JACK STRAW

Mr. PARKER-JENNINGS

Mrs. PARKER-JENNINGS

VINCENT

ETHEL

AMBROSE HOLLAND

LADY WANLEY

LORD SERLO

COUNT ADRIAN VON BREMER

HORTON WITHERS

Mrs. WITHERS

The Rev. LEWIS ABBOTT

ROSIE ABBOTT

Waiters at the Grand Babylon Hotel and
Footmen at Taverner, the Parker-Jennings'
place in Cheshire

TIME: *The Present Day*

ACT I—*The Lounge of the Grand Babylon Hotel*

ACTS II and III—*The Parker-Jennings place
in Cheshire*

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JACK STRAW

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE: *The lounge and winter garden of the Grand Babylon Hotel. There are palms and flowers in profusion, and numbers of little tables, surrounded each by two or three chairs. Several people are seated, drinking coffee and liqueurs. At the back a flight of steps leads to the restaurant, separated from the winter garden by a leaded glass partition and swinging doors. In the restaurant a band is playing.*

Two or three waiters in uniform are standing about or serving customers.

AMBROSE HOLLAND and LADY WANLEY come out from the restaurant. He is a well-dressed, elegant man of five and thirty. She is a handsome widow of uncertain age.

LADY WANLEY.

[*Pausing at the foot of the steps.*] Where shall we sit?

HOLLAND.

Let us choose a retired corner where we can gossip in peace.

LADY WANLEY.

Nonsense! I didn't come to the Grand Babylon in order to blush unseen. I caught sight of a number of people during luncheon, who I'm quite determined shall catch sight of me now.

HOLLAND.

I was sufficiently gallant to have eyes for you only.

LADY WANLEY.

[*Pointing to a table.*] Shall we sit there?

HOLLAND.

D'you mind sitting on the other side? The waiter's rather a pal of mine.

LADY WANLEY.

[*Sitting down.*] What queer friends you have.

HOLLAND.

Waiter.

A WAITER.

[*Coming forward.*] Your waiter will be here in one minute, sir.

HOLLAND.

[*To LADY WANLEY.*] You see, I've knocked about in so many places that I have friends in every city in the world and every rank in life.

LADY WANLEY.

I suppose you saw the Parker-Jennings? They were sitting three tables from us.

HOLLAND.

I did.

LADY WANLEY.

Do you know that she cut me dead when I came in?

HOLLAND.

I've long told you that Mrs. Parker-Jennings is growing exclusive.

LADY WANLEY.

But, my dear Ambrose, that she should have the impudence to cut me. . . .

HOLLAND.

[*Smiling.*] I respect her for it.

LADY WANLEY.

I'm much obliged to you.

HOLLAND.

I don't think it does much credit to her heart, but it certainly does to her understanding. She has discovered that a title nowadays is not nearly such a good passport to the world of fashion as she thought it was. She knows you're as poor as a church mouse, and she's realised that in Society the poor are quite rightly hated and despised by all who know them.

LADY WANLEY.

Yes, but remember the circumstances. Five years ago the Parker-Jennings didn't know a soul in the world. They'd lived in Brixton all their lives.

HOLLAND.

It has been whispered to me that in those days they were known as Mr. and Mrs. Bob Jennings—not nearly so smart, is it?

LADY WANLEY.

He used to go to the City every morning with a black bag in one hand and an umbrella in the other.

HOLLAND.

I wish that confounded waiter would come.

LADY WANLEY.

One day an uncle in the North, from whom they vaguely had expectations, died suddenly and left them nearly two millions.

HOLLAND.

Some people are so lucky in the way they choose their uncles.

LADY WANLEY.

He was a hardware manufacturer, and no one dreamt that he had a tenth part of that fortune. I came across them in Switzerland and found they were looking for a house.

HOLLAND

So, with a burst of hospitality, you asked them down to Taverner, and they took it for twenty-one years.

LADY WANLEY.

I introduced them to every one in the county. I gave little parties so that they might meet people. And now, if you please, the woman cuts me.

HOLLAND.

[*Dryly.*] You have left out an essential detail in the account of your relations with these good folk.

LADY WANLEY.

Have I ?

HOLLAND.

[*Smiling.*] You have omitted to mention that when they took Taverner they agreed to pay an exorbitant rent.

LADY WANLEY.

They could well afford it. Besides, it was a historic place. It was worth whatever I could get for it.

HOLLAND.

Parker-Jennings may be very vulgar, but he's as shrewd a man as you'd find anywhere between Park Lane and Jerusalem.

LADY WANLEY.

I haven't the least idea what you're talking about.

HOLLAND.

Haven't you? Well, then, I venture to suggest that if Mr. Parker-Jennings gave you such an enormous rent for 'Taverner, it was on a certain understanding. He was wise enough to find out that people can live in Cheshire all their lives and never know a soul. I don't suppose he put it in the agreement between you, but unless I am very much mistaken he took your place only on the condition that you should get every one to call.

LADY WANLEY.

[*After a brief pause.*] I was crippled with mortgages, and I had to send my boys to Eton.

HOLLAND.

Good heavens, I'm not blaming you. I only wish to point out that if you introduced Mrs. Jennings to your friends, it was a matter of business rather than of sentiment.

LADY WANLEY.

[*With a little laugh.*] I suppose you think it's very natural that she should wish to kick away the ladder by which she climbed.

[*A WAITER comes up to HOLLAND.*

WAITER (JACK STRAW).

Yes, sir.

HOLLAND.

Two coffees and two Benedictines. But you're not my usual waiter. Where's Pierre?

WAITER.

[*Blandly.*] He's attending the funeral of an elderly female relative, sir.

[HOLLAND *looks up quickly, and then stares in a puzzled way.*

HOLLAND.

I seem to know your face. Have I seen you anywhere?

WAITER.

[*With a smile.*] Mr. Ambrose Holland, I think.

HOLLAND.

Jack Straw! What on earth are you doing here?

JACK STRAW.

My dear fellow, it is possible to be no less of a philosopher in the uniform of a waiter at the Grand Babylon Hotel than in the gown of a professor at the University of Oxford. [*He goes out.*

LADY WANLEY.

[*Laughing.*] It's really very odd that waiters should address you as my dear fellow.

HOLLAND.

What an extraordinary encounter!

LADY WANLEY.

Please tell me who your friend is.

HOLLAND.

I haven't the ghost of an idea.

LADY WANLEY.

My dear Ambrose.

HOLLAND.

I first met him in the States. I was in considerable financial difficulties in those days—it's three or four years ago now—and I got a small part in a travelling company. Jack Straw was a member of it, and we became great friends.

LADY WANLEY.

Is that his name?

HOLLAND.

So he assures me.

LADY WANLEY.

It's very improbable, isn't it?

HOLLAND.

Very. I believe Jack Straw was a highwayman, or something like that, and he's given his name to a public-house in Hampstead.

LADY WANLEY.

He must be an extraordinary man.

HOLLAND.

He is. I don't know whether I admire most his self-assurance or his resourcefulness. I spent with

him the last two years before my ship came home. We had some pretty rough times together, but he was a pillar of strength. Difficulties seemed to arise only that he might surmount them.

LADY WANLEY.

He sounds quite splendid.

HOLLAND.

The worst of living with him was that you had no breathing-time. He's a man with an uncontrollable love of adventure. Prosperity bores him to death, and time after time, when we'd managed to get out of rough water into smooth, he'd throw up everything for some wild goose chase.

LADY WANLEY.

But who are his people?

HOLLAND.

Heaven only knows. I know he isn't English, though he speaks it wonderfully.

LADY WANLEY.

Is he by way of being a gentleman?

HOLLAND.

I can only tell you that he's thoroughly at home in whatever society he finds himself.

LADY WANLEY.

I daresay that's not a bad definition of a gentleman.

HOLLAND.

He's sailed before the mast, been a bar-tender in New York, and an engine-driver on the Canadian Pacific. He's been a miner up in the Klondyke, and he's worked on a ranch in Texas. And if he's a waiter now, I daresay he'll be an organ-grinder next week, and a company-promoter the week after. I've seen half a dozen fortunes within his grasp, and he's let them all slip through his fingers from sheer indifference to money.

LADY WANLEY.

Here he is with the coffee.

[JACK STRAW *comes in with coffee and liqueurs.*

HOLLAND.

I should be overwhelmed with confusion at allowing you to wait on me, if I did not feel certain that it appeals enormously to your sense of humour.

JACK STRAW.

It has occurred to me that you will feel a natural hesitation about giving me a tip. I may as well tell you at once that I shall feel none about taking it.

HOLLAND.

It's thoughtful of you to warn me. How much do I owe you?

JACK STRAW.

Two shillings the coffee and three shillings the liqueur. The prices seem exorbitant to me, but I

suppose people must expect to pay for the privilege of letting their friends see them at the best hotel in Europe.

HOLLAND.

[*Putting down a coin.*] Don't bother about the change.

JACK STRAW.

Half a sovereign. My dear fellow, when you offer me a tip of five shillings you are presuming unwarrantably on our former acquaintance.

HOLLAND.

[*Helplessly.*] I'm sure I beg your pardon.

JACK STRAW.

I will keep one shilling as an adequate remuneration for my services and return you four.

HOLLAND.

I am overpowered by your condescension.

JACK STRAW.

[*To LADY WANLEY, who has put a cigarette in her mouth.*] Light, madam?

HOLLAND.

I should like to ask you to sit down.

JACK STRAW.

It would be eminently improper. Besides, I have other tables to attend to. But I shall be delighted

to dine with you to-night if you have no other engagement.

HOLLAND.

It's very kind of you. But will not your duties here detain you? . . . Mr. Straw—Lady Wanley.

JACK STRAW.

[*Bowing.*] How do you do. I'm only engaged here for the afternoon. Your ladyship is aware that the lower orders make a speciality in the decease of elderly female relatives.

LADY WANLEY.

I have often been impressed by the piety with which they bury their maternal grandmothers.

JACK STRAW.

It appears that Pierre, an old acquaintance of mine, wished to attend the funeral of a widowed aunt, the relic of an egg importer in Soho, and a highly respectable person.

LADY WANLEY.

I can well imagine that nothing could be more respectable than to import eggs to Soho.

JACK STRAW.

The head-waiter, who is an excellent fellow, with female relatives of his own, promised to overlook his absence if he could find a substitute. Pierre, like myself, is a person of somewhat striking physique and could find no one able to wear his clothes. He

confided his distress to me, and I, knowing that his uniform would fit me like a glove offered, at once to step into the breach.

HOLLAND.

I am relieved to hear that your appearance in this capacity is not due to embarrassed circumstances.

JACK STRAW.

I deplore the hastiness of your reasoning. My circumstances are excessively embarrassed. Excuse me, I see some people who are proposing to sit at one of my tables.

[Meanwhile people have been coming down from the restaurant and sitting at the various tables. Waiters have been handing them coffee. HORTON WITHERS and MRS. WITHERS come down, accompanied by the REV. LEWIS ABBOTT and MRS. ABBOTT (ROSIE). JACK STRAW leaves HOLLAND and LADY WANLEY to attend to some people.]

LADY WANLEY.

There are the Withers. Why, they've got Rosie with them and her husband.

[She gets up and goes towards the WITHERS, who are honest, simple people, not distinguished, but good-natured and kindly. LEWIS ABBOTT is a nice-looking, frank young parson. ROSIE is very pretty and fragile. She is simply dressed.]

LADY WANLEY.

[*Smiling to ROSIE.*] My dear, what are you doing in this sink of iniquity? I am surprised to see you. And Lewis!

[*She shakes hands, evidently delighted to see them.*]

WITHERS.

We've brought them up to London for a little jaunt.

HOLLAND.

Won't you all sit at our table? There's plenty of room.

WITHERS.

That's very kind of you. [*To his wife.*] Fanny, you know Mr. Holland.

MRS. WITHERS.

Yes, of course I do. How do you do, Lady Wanley.

LADY WANLEY.

How do you do? Now you two young things must sit one on each side of me, and you must tell me all about Taverner.

ROSIE.

Oh, we're so happy there, and everything's beautiful, and we just love the house.

LADY WANLEY.

I don't believe you know Mr. Holland. Ambrose, this is Rosie, Jasper Neville's daughter. You knew him well, didn't you?

HOLLAND.

Of course I did.

LADY WANLEY.

And this is Rosie's husband and my new Vicar at Taverner.

ABBOTT.

It makes me feel awfully grand.

LADY WANLEY.

I adore them both, so you must like them. These dear things were waiting to be married. Lewis was a curate in some dreadfully shabby suburb, and he's a saint.

ABBOTT.

I wish you wouldn't say such absurd things about me.

LADY WANLEY.

Nonsense. He's a saint, but quite a modern nice sort of saint, who plays cricket and doesn't wear a hair shirt. And of course he couldn't marry Rosie, who hadn't a penny to bless herself with, but Providence came to the rescue and carried off our old Vicar with influenza.

ROSIE.

What dreadful things you say, Lady Wanley!

LADY WANLEY.

And the living's in my gift, so I gave it to them, and there they are.

ROSIE.

You have been nice to us.

LADY WANLEY.

My dears, you're the only really good people I've ever known in my life. I used to think my boys were till they went to Eton, and now I know they're devils.

WITHERS.

We're all under a debt of gratitude to you, Lady Wanley. Every one worships them in the parish.

ABBOTT.

Every one's been very jolly, and they all try to make things easy for us.

MRS. WITHERS.

You know, they will work so hard, we could hardly persuade them to come up to London for two or three days.

WITHERS.

I daresay you've heard that we've taken a little place near Taverner.

HOLLAND.

Lady Wanley was telling me at luncheon.

LADY WANLEY.

[To ROSIE.] And are you enjoying yourself in London, darling?

ROSIE.

[*Enthusiastically.*] Oh, it's simply splendid. You don't know what a treat it is to us to come to the Grand Babylon. It makes us feel so smart. And to-night we're going to the Gaiety.

LADY WANLEY.

[*To Withers.*] It's very nice of you to be so good to these young people.

MRS. WITHERS.

It's a pleasure to us to see how they enjoy everything.

ROSIE.

D'you know the Parker-Jennings are here? Isn't it nice? They will be surprised when they see us, won't they, Lewis?

MRS. WITHERS.

[*With a little sniff.*] I see Maria Jennings has got a lord with her.

HOLLAND.

Serlo, isn't it? I thought I saw him.

WITHERS.

I suppose you know they're trying to hook him for Ethel?

LADY WANLEY.

Good heavens!

MRS. WITHERS.

[*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] As long as he's a Marquess, and he's that all right, Maria Jennings don't mind the rest.

LADY WANLEY.

I hope Ethel will refuse to have anything to do with him.

ROSIE.

She's a dear, isn't she? I'm so fond of her, and she's simply devoted to Lewis.

LADY WANLEY.

My dear, do you never say anything against any one?

ROSIE.

[*With a laugh.*] Seldom. Everybody's so nice.

LADY WANLEY.

It must make conversation very difficult. But Ethel is a charming girl, and I shouldn't like her to fall into the hands of that disgraceful young rip.

MRS. WITHERS.

She's the only one of the family who hasn't had her head turned by all the money.

LADY WANLEY.

Of course you knew Mrs. Jennings before she was the exalted person she is now.

MRS. WITHERS.

Bless you, I've known her all my life. We went to the Brixton High School together, and I was a bridesmaid at her wedding. Why, we used to be popping in and out of one another's houses all day long.

WITHERS.

And now, if you please, she'll hardly look at us.

ABBOTT.

I'm afraid people don't much like her at Taverner, but she's done everything she could for us, and they're awfully generous.

ROSIE.

I don't care what anybody says about her, she's been perfectly sweet to me. She told me that I might come to the Hall whenever I wanted to, and I'm always dropping in to lunch there.

LADY WANLEY.

Oh well, if they're nice to you, I forgive them. Mrs. Jennings can cut me till she's blue in the face.

ROSIE.

Oh look, there's the Count.

[A distinguished-looking old man comes out of the restaurant and walks slowly down the steps.]

LADY WANLEY.

It's Adrian von Bremer. How on earth d'you know him?

ROSIE.

I don't, but he's rented a place in Cheshire, and he came to church once.

LADY WANLEY.

It's the Pomeranian Ambassador, you know.

MRS. WITHERS.

I know him well by sight.

LADY WANLEY.

I wish he'd come and talk to us. I should like to introduce Lewis to him.

HOLLAND.

He's as blind as a bat. I don't suppose he'll see us.

[Meanwhile VON BREMER has reflectively put an eyeglass in his eye, and looks round as he walks out. He catches sight of LADY WANLEY, and smiling, comes up to her.]

VON BREMER.

How do you do.

HOLLAND.

You look as if you were just going.

VON BREMER.

I am. I had my coffee in the restaurant.

LADY WANLEY.

What is the news in Pomerania?

VON BREMER.

None except that our Emperor is growing old. All these domestic troubles of his are breaking him down.

LADY WANLEY.

Poor old thing.

HOLLAND.

I suppose nothing has been heard of the Archduke Sebastian?

VON BREMER.

Nothing. We've given up the search.

HOLLAND.

[To LADY WANLEY.] You remember that affair, don't you? There was some quarrel in the domestic circle, and the Archduke Sebastian suddenly disappeared—four years ago, now, isn't it?—and hasn't been heard of since. He simply vanished into thin air.

LADY WANLEY.

But how do you know he's alive?

VON BREMER.

Every Christmas the Emperor receives a letter from him, sent from different parts of the world, saying he's well and happy.

LADY WANLEY.

It's really very romantic. I wonder what on earth he's doing.

VON BREMER.

Heaven only knows.

LADY WANLEY.

Tell me, how is that nice young *attaché* of yours that I met at luncheon the other day.

VON BREMER.

The nice young *attaché* has come to a bad end. I've had to send him back to Pomerania.

LADY WANLEY.

Really ?

VON BREMER.

The story is rather entertaining. There's an American woman here who has a passion for titles, and it occurred to my *attaché* one day to introduce his valet to her as Count So-and So. Of course she was full of attentions and immediately asked the valet to dinner. Presently the story came to my ears. I really couldn't have my *attachés* playing practical jokes of that sort, and so I sent him home.

LADY WANLEY.

Poor boy, he was so nice.

VON BREMER.

Good-bye.

LADY WANLEY.

Oh, may I introduce Mr. Abbott to you. He's your new Vicar at Taverner. And this is Mrs. Abbott. You must be very nice to her.

VON BREMER.

I'm delighted to meet you. I've heard wonderful stories of your good works in the parish.

ABBOTT.

It's very kind of you to say so.

VON BREMER.

[*To ROSIE.*] If you will allow me I should like to call on you when I come down to Cheshire.

ROSIE.

I shall be so pleased to see you.

VON BREMER.

Good-bye.

[He bows and goes out.]

ROSIE.

Wasn't it nice of him to say he'd call? You know, he never goes anywhere.

WITHERS.

I can see Mrs. Jennings' face when she hears that the Count has been to see you, my dear.

HOLLAND.

Why do you say that?

MRS. WITHERS.

The Count lives next door to them in the country, and they've moved heaven and earth to know him, but he simply won't look at them. Maria would give her eyes if he'd call on her.

ROSIE.

How can you say such horrid things about her!

[During the last two or three speeches Mr. and Mrs. PARKER-JENNINGS come down the steps, followed by ETHEL, VINCENT and SERLO. SERLO goes over to talk to a flatteringly dressed girl at another table. PARKER-JENNINGS is a little stontish man,

JACK STRAW

very common and self-assertive. His wife is of a determined appearance, vulgar, and magnificently dressed. VINCENT is showy and aggressive. ETHEL is very charming and very pretty. SERLO is quite insignificant. MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS comes down the centre of the stage, with her party, elaborately ignoring LADY WANLEY'S table. ROSIE gets up and goes to her impulsively. MRS. WITHERS and her husband rise.

ROSIE.

Mrs. Jennings, I am so glad to see you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Frigidly putting up her glasses.*] Mrs. Abbott.

WITHERS.

Hullo, Bob, old man, how are the chicks?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

We're all in the best of 'ealth, thank you.

ETHEL.

[*Shaking hands with MRS. WITHERS.*] I was hoping we should have a chance of speaking to you.

MRS. WITHERS

What a picture you look, my dear! What's the matter with Vincent? Why are you trying to look as if you'd never seen me before?

VINCENT.

You'll never allow me to forget you, Mrs. Withers.

MRS. WITHERS.

No, I won't. And many's the time I've bathed you, my lad, in that little back room in St. John's Road, Brixton, and don't you forget that either.

ROSIE.

[*Enthusiastically to* MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.]
Aren't you surprised to see us here? Mr. and Mrs. Withers are giving us such a treat.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I shouldn't 'ave thought this quite the place for a clergyman's wife to come to. I confess I'm surprised you should find time to leave your work at Taverner in order to gad about in London.

[*ROSIE is taken aback by the snub, and her face falls.*]

ROSIE.

But we're only here for a day or two. We shall be home on Thursday. I was wondering if I might come up to luncheon as Lewis has got to go out.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I'm expecting Lord Serlo's mother and Lady Eleanor King to stay with me, so perhaps you'd better not come up to the 'all for a few days. I'm sure you understand, don't you. I don't want to 'urt

your feelings, but I don't think you're quite the sort of person they'd like to meet.

[ROSIE gives a little gasp.

ETHEL.

[*Indignantly.*] Mother.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I'll let you know when it's convenient for you to call. I'm afraid you're a little inclined to be pushing, my dear. You don't mind my telling you, do you? It's not quite the correct thing in a clergyman's wife.

[*She turns her back on ROSIE, who is left gasping. She tries to choke her sobs, but tears of mortification roll down her cheeks.*

LADY WANLEY.

Oh, the cad, the cad.

[*She makes ROSIE sit down and comforts her.*

ETHEL.

Mother, how could you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Hold your tongue, Ethel. I've been wanting to give those people a lesson for some time. Where's our table, Robert?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

There are some people sitting there, my dear. We shall 'ave to take this one.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Didn't you tell the waiter to reserve it? Waiter!

JACK STRAW.

Yes, madam.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

You must tell those people that that table's taken.

JACK STRAW.

I'm very sorry, madam. Will this one not do instead?

ETHEL.

Yes, mother. Let's sit here.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I'm not going to let people push me into any 'ole and corner they like.

VINCENT.

Cheek, I call it.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Come on, sit down, mother.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Unwillingly taking her seat at a vacant table.*] How often 'ave I told you not to call me mother? My name's Marion; I'm sure you ought to know it by now.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Is it? I always thought it was Maria.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[To JACK STRAW.] What are you waiting there for?

JACK STRAW.

I thought the gentleman wished to give an order, madam.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Why didn't you keep that table, eh?

JACK STRAW.

I'm very sorry, madam, I daresay I misunderstood you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Don't you know English?

JACK STRAW.

Perfectly, madam.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I don't know what they want to engage these dirty foreigners for, they make me sick.

ETHEL.

Mother, he can hear every word you say.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Two coffees, and bring all the liqueurs you've got.

JACK STRAW.

Very well, sir, cigars or cigarettes?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Bring some cigars, and none of your twopenny stinkers. Bring the most expensive cigars you've got. I'll soon show them who I am.

JACK STRAW.

Very well, sir.

[*Exit.*]

ETHEL.

Mother, how could you be so brutal to poor Rosie. What has she done to you?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I wish you wouldn't call me mother, Ethel. It sounds so common. Why don't you call me mamma?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Who's 'is lordship talking to?

VINCENT.

Oh, that's little Flossie Squaretoes. I'll go and give her a look up in a minute.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I wish you were a little more like your brother, Ethel. He knows 'ow to live up to 'is position.

VINCENT.

Aitches, mater, aitches.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, you always say I drop my aitches, Vincent. Well, if I do I can afford it.

VINCENT.

You're wrong, mater, only the aristocracy can afford to drop their aitches.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, well, p'raps we shall be aristocracy one of these days, eh, Robert?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

You leave it to me, my dear. If money can do it. . . . I say, 'is lordship lapped up that 'ock of mine at luncheon, didn't he?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I wish you could get out of that 'abit of yours of always locking at what people eat and drink. And what if he did lap it up. You didn't put it there for people to look at, did you?

VINCENT.

I say, Ethel, you needn't have turned your back on him all the time.

ETHEL.

I thought he drank too much.

VINCENT.

Your ideas are so beastly middle-class. You mustn't expect a man like Serlo to do things like—like the people we used to know at. . . .

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

That'll do, Vincent. We all know quite well where we used to live before your father's poor uncle was taken, and you needn't refer to it. [ETHEL *shrugs her shoulders impatiently.*] It seems to me that Vincent and I are the only ones of the family who know 'ow to live up to our position. [JACK STRAW *comes up with the coffee and liqueurs. Another waiter hands round the cigars. SERLO rejoins them.*] [*Very affably.*] Come and sit by me, Lord Serlo. Now what liqueurs will you 'ave? If there's anything you fancy, you just ask for it.

[ROSIE *gives a little sob.*]

LADY WANLEY.

Oh, my dear, don't, don't. You mustn't mind.

ROSIE.

I feel so frightfully humiliated. She asked me to go to the hall whenever I felt inclined, and I thought she really meant it. I never knew that I wasn't wanted. It's so awful to know that they only thought me horribly pushing.

ABBOTT.

By Jove, I wish it had been one of the men. I should have liked to knock him down and stamp on him.

LADY WANLEY.

My dear Lewis, how nice and unchristian of you ! I always said you were just the right sort of saint for me.

MRS. WITHERS.

Wouldn't you like to come away now, my dear ?

ROSIE.

Oh yes, I feel I want to hide myself.

LADY WANLEY.

Good-bye darling, don't take it too much to heart. [*The WITHERS, ABBOTT, and ROSIE shake hands with HOLLAND and LADY WANLEY, and go out.*] Did you ever hear anything so fiendish ? Oh, if I could only make that woman suffer as she's made poor little Rosie suffer. [*Suddenly LADY WANLEY gets an idea. She leans forward.*] Ambrose.

HOLLAND.

What's the matter ?

LADY WANLEY.

I've got it.

HOLLAND.

What d'you mean ?

LADY WANLEY.

One of these days Mrs. Jennings will give her eyes not to have insulted that poor child. I'm going to give her a lesson that she'll never forget.

HOLLAND.

She deserves pretty well anything that your feminine spite can suggest.

LADY WANLEY.

I can do nothing without you, Ambrose.

HOLLAND.

Don't ask me to do anything very disreputable.

LADY WANLEY.

I've got her in the hollow of my hand, Ambrose

HOLLAND.

Well?

LADY WANLEY.

Don't you remember that story Adrian von Bremer told us about the *attaché*? Let's try it on Mrs. Jennings.

HOLLAND.

But. . . .

LADY WANLEY.

Oh, don't make any objections. You *must* remember He introduced his valet to a woman as a foreign nobleman of sorts.

HOLLAND.

I'm bound to say I thought it a very silly trick.

LADY WANLEY.

I have no patience with you. Think how exactly the punishment fits the crime. What a triumph it

would be if we got Mrs. Parker-Jennings to take to her bosom. . . .

HOLLAND.

Who ?

LADY WANLEY.

Your friend the waiter. I'm sure he'll do it if you ask him. He'll look upon it as an adventure.

HOLLAND.

I don't think he'd do it. He's an odd fellow.

LADY WANLEY.

Oh, but ask him. There can be no harm in that.

HOLLAND.

It's all very well. But one has to consider the possible complications.

LADY WANLEY.

There can't be any complications. We only want to punish an insolent snob who's wantonly insulted a woman who never hurt a fly in her life.

[JACK STRAW *comes up to their table.*

JACK STRAW.

Have you done with the Benedictine, sir ?

LADY WANLEY.

Mr. Straw, will you do something for me ?

JACK STRAW.

Anything in the world, madam.

LADY WANLEY.

Mr. Holland tells me you're a man of spirit.

JACK STRAW.

Pray tell Mr. Holland he's a man of discernment.

LADY WANLEY.

Are you ready still for any adventure that comes your way ?

JACK STRAW.

So long as I can do it with clean hands.

LADY WANLEY.

Dear me.

JACK STRAW.

I daresay your ladyship thinks it odd that a waiter should have susceptibilities.

HOLLAND.

Let me tell you at once that I highly disapprove of Lady Wanley's idea.

JACK STRAW.

Then pray let me hear it. You always disapprove of everything that is not hopelessly commonplace.

LADY WANLEY.

You told us just now that you were only temporarily engaged here.

JACK STRAW.

Quite right, madam.

LADY WANLEY.

You see those people over there—two women and three men?

JACK STRAW.

The elder lady was so amiable as to call me a dirty foreigner.

LADY WANLEY.

They're the worst sort of *parvenus*. I think they're the greatest snobs in London. I have a little grudge against them.

JACK STRAW.

Yes?

LADY WANLEY.

[*Slightly embarrassed.*] I want to introduce you to them—as a foreign nobleman.

JACK STRAW.

[*Giving her a searching look.*] Why?

PARKER-JENNINGS

[*Loudly.*] Waiter.

LADY WANLEY.

It would amuse me to see them fawn upon you.

[*A pause.*]

JACK STRAW.

No, I'm afraid I can't do that.

LADY WANLEY.

[*Frigidly.*] Then we'll say no more about it.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Loudly.*] Waiter.

JACK STRAW.

[*Going to him.*] Yes, sir.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Why the devil don't you hurry up. I've called three times.

JACK STRAW.

[*Blundly.*] I'm very sorry, sir. I was engaged at another table.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

You seem to think you can keep me waiting all day. I suppose that's why you're called a waiter.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Robert, don't make jokes with menials.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

I've got a good mind to report you to the management.

ETHEL.

Papa, he came as quickly as he could.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

This coffee's disgusting. I don't know what you make it out of. It tastes like ditchwater.

JACK STRAW.

I'm very sorry, sir. Let me get you some more.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

And look sharp about it, or you'll find yourself decorated with an order you don't know in your country.

JACK STRAW.

I beg your pardon, sir?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

The order of the boot.

VINCENT.

I can't think why they don't have English waiters in a smart hotel like this instead of these damned foreigners.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Now then, look slippy.

[JACK STRAW *has fixed his eyes on* ETHEL. *She has been looking down. She gives him a glance. He takes the coffee things and gives them to another waiter.*

ETHEL.

[*Her voice trembling with indignation.*] How can you talk like that to a man who can't defend himself! It's so cowardly to insult a servant who daren't answer.

VINCENT.

I should think not indeed. I should like to see any servant answer me.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

You never 'ave learnt 'ow to treat servants, Ethel. You always talk to them as if they was one of ourselves. I wish you could take a leaf out of Vincent's book. Treat 'em like dirt, and they'll respect you.

[JACK STRAW *having given instructions to the waiter, goes to* HOLLAND *and* LADY WANLEY.

JACK STRAW.

I'm willing to do what you asked me to.

HOLLAND.

Why have you changed your mind?

JACK STRAW.

To tell you the truth I'm perfectly indifferent to the rudeness and the vulgarity of your friends, but I think I should like to know that young lady.

HOLLAND.

Would you, by Jove!

JACK STRAW.

When her father insulted me, the most ravishing colour came into her pale cheeks, and she looked at

me with the most beautiful eyes in the world. And they were veiled with tears.

LADY WANLEY.

And is that enough to make you change your mind?

HOLLAND.

Fortunately Mr. Straw is not in the habit of falling in love, or I should refuse to hear anything more of this cracked-brained scheme.

LADY WANLEY.

When will you be ready?

JACK STRAW.

I'm ready now. It's three o'clock, and Pierre is waiting in the basement to put on this uniform.

LADY WANLEY.

We couldn't find a better place than this to effect an introduction.

JACK STRAW.

Give me two minutes to change my clothes, and I am at your service.

LADY WANLEY.

You have indeed an adventurous spirit.

JACK STRAW.

But I must make one condition—two, in fact.

LADY WANLEY.

What are they ?

JACK STRAW.

Well, although you have glided over the point with singular discretion, it is plain that you do not want me to assume a certain character merely in order to enjoy a private snigger at the expense of these amiable people.

LADY WANLEY.

I don't think I know what you mean ?

JACK STRAW.

Madam, it is always dangerous to count too much on the stupidity of one's fellows. We shall arrange this matter much better if you realise that I'm a person of some shrewdness.

HOLLAND.

Go on.

JACK STRAW.

It is evident that you wish these good folk to take me to their bosom in order that you may have the opportunity of telling them one day that I'm merely an impostor.

LADY WANLEY.

I really hadn't thought about that.

JACK STRAW.

I venture to suspect that you rate your intelligence too low.

JACK STRAW

LADY WANLEY.

Well, what is your condition ?

JACK STRAW.

The position will be very humiliating to me. For all I know it may bring me into uncomfortable relations with the police.

HOLLAND.

I think the whole plan had better be dropped. It will lead to endless bother.

JACK STRAW.

I have no wish to drop it. You want to revenge yourself on some people who have insulted you. I, for reasons of my own, am willing to help. But I make the condition that you do not disclose the truth till I give you leave. I promise not to withhold it unreasonably.

LADY WANLEY.

I accept that. And the second condition ?

JACK STRAW.

Is very easy. I insist that you should behave towards me, whether we're alone or in public, as you naturally would if I were really the individual I propose to personate.

LADY WANLEY.

That's only fair. Now who can we suggest that you should be ?

HOLLAND.

You'd better try and invent some character who you're quite sure doesn't exist.

LADY WANLEY.

We want something very extravagant and high-sounding.

JACK STRAW.

Pray do not put yourselves to the trouble of thinking. You will introduce me to your friends as the Archduke Sebastian of Pomerania.

HOLLAND.

What!

LADY WANLEY.

But that's a real person!

JACK STRAW.

To invent an imaginary one would be ridiculous. Your friends would only need to look in the Almanack de Gotha to discover the fraud.

LADY WANLEY.

But Count von Bremer was talking to us about him just now. The Archduke Sebastian is the man who mysteriously disappeared.

JACK STRAW.

It's because his whereabouts are unknown that he's the safest person to choose.

HOLLAND.

You would never be able to pass yourself off for an Archduke.

JACK STRAW.

Strange as it may seem to you, a royal prince eats, drinks, breathes, and behaves generally very much like men of baser clay.

LADY WANLEY.

You'd be found out in a week.

JACK STRAW.

But how do you know I'm not the Archduke Sebastian?

HOLLAND.

[*With a scornful laugh.*] You look it.

LADY WANLEY.

But you'd want a suite and all sorts of things.

JACK STRAW.

The man is notoriously eccentric. I think it very likely that the company of a stuffy old Colonel of Dragoons would bore him to death.

HOLLAND.

It's preposterous.

JACK STRAW.

You may either take it or leave it. I will be the Archduke Sebastian or nobody.

LADY WANLEY.

After all, Mrs. Jennings will probably never have heard of this trumpery Archduke.

JACK STRAW.

And if she has, what more probable than that, having had enough of retirement, he should enter once more upon the position which is his by rights?

LADY WANLEY.

[*Looking at HOLLAND.*] It makes the joke infinitely better.

JACK STRAW.

You must make up your minds at once.

LADY WANLEY.

Ambrose, let's toss. Heads it is, and tails it isn't.

HOLLAND.

All right. [*He tosses a coin.*] Tails.

LADY WANLEY.

I said, tails it is, didn't I? . . . I'm willing to risk it.

JACK STRAW.

Give me two minutes.

[*He goes out.*]

HOLLAND.

Heaven only knows what will be the end of it.

[*LORD SERLO comes up to them.*]

SERLO.

Hello, Ambrose. How's life? How d'ye do?

LADY WANLEY.

What have you been doing?

SERLO.

I've been lettin' Jennings' Patent Hardware stand me a lunch. My word, that old woman's so vulgar she just about takes the roof of your head off.

HOLLAND.

Why do you lunch with people you thoroughly despise?

SERLO.

Despise 'em! I don't despise people who've got eighty thousand a year. They're trying to hook me for their girl.

HOLLAND.

And are you proposing to—throw yourself away?

SERLO.

She's a very neat-steppin' little filly—swallowed a poker in her childhood—regrettable accident in the nursery, don't you know, but sound in wind and limb and all that sort of thing.

LADY WANLEY.

I admire your romantic air.

SERLO.

Whoever talked of romance? There's half a million down on one side and an old-established marquisate on the other.

HOLLAND.

When is the happy event to take place?

SERLO.

Well, as soon as we can get over a triflin' impediment.

LADY WANLEY.

What's that?

SERLO.

Well, the filly's kicking. Have to put a red ribbon on her tail, don't you know.

LADY WANLEY.

She's refusing the coronet you lay at her feet?

SERLO.

Won't touch it with the fag end of a barge pole. I was sittin' next to her at lunch, and she simply turned

her back on me—no mistakin' it, don't you know. Wouldn't let me get a word in edgeways. Mother's all over me, father's all over me, son's all over me. What's the good of that? Can't marry them. Rotten, I call it. Came over here to have a bit of a rest.

LADY WANLEY.

[*Laughing.*] And how d'you like Vincent?

SERLO.

Rotten bounder. Can't stick him at any price, knows too many lords for me. When he's my brother-in-law—hoof him out, don't you know—double quick march. Pretty Polly's all very well but I'm not takin' her family. Can't do it for half a million, don't you know. Must be practical.

[VINCENT *comes up to them.*

VINCENT.

How d'you do, Lady Wanley? I saw you driving with Lady Mary Ware yesterday. Such a nice girl, isn't she? I suppose you know her brother Tregury, don't you? Great pal of mine at Oxford.

LADY WANLEY.

He's my second cousin, Mr. Jennings, and he pronounces his name Tregary.

VINCENT.

Oh yes, of course. I always used to call him Tregury for fun.

LADY WANLEY.

Did you ?

HOLLAND.

You have a very keen sense of humour.

VINCENT.

I was just having an argument with the mater as to what relation he was to the Duke of Sherwin.

LADY WANLEY.

I'm afraid I haven't your intimate knowledge of the peerage, but I should think the only relation they've had in common for the last two centuries is that lamented monarch, Charles II.

VINCENT.

[To SERLO.] Nice chap, Sherwin.

SERLO.

Dunno him.

VINCENT.

Don't you ? Not know Sherwin ? I must introduce you to him. I'm sure he'd like to know you. Thorough sportsman.

SERLO.

Is he?

VINCENT.

Yes, rather. I saw him looking on at a cricket match the other day. Great pal of my governor's, you know. Thorough English gentleman.

SERLO.

They'd get on well together.

LADY WANLEY.

[*To HOLLAND.*] Here is our friend.

JACK STRAW *comes in, hat and cane in hand. He wears a very smart suit, tail coat, grey trousers, &c.*

JACK STRAW.

I'm so sorry I couldn't come to lunch with you.

[*He shakes LADY WANLEY'S hand, she slightly curtsies to him. MRS. JENNINGS nudges her husband, and they both stare with all their eyes.*

LADY WANLEY.

It's very good of you to have come now, sir.

JACK STRAW.

Ah, my dear Holland, you are looking the picture of health.

HOLLAND.

It's very kind of you, sir.

LADY WANLEY.

May I introduce Lord Serlo to you?

JACK STRAW.

[*Shaking hands with him.*] How d'you do. I think your father was ambassador in Pomerania for some time.

SERLO.

Yes, he was.

HOLLAND.

[*Surprised.*] How did you know that—sir?

JACK STRAW.

I remember him quite well. He used to play with me when I was a little boy. I was so sorry to hear of his death.

SERLO.

He wasn't a bad old buffer. Kept me dooced short of money, though.

JACK STRAW.

[*Gaily.*] But unless you introduce me to Lord Serlo he won't know who on earth I am.

LADY WANLEY.

I thought every one knew, at least by sight, the —Archduke Sebastian of Pomerania.

JACK STRAW.

You talk of me as if I were a notorious character. [*Meanwhile VINCENT has been making frantic signs to be introduced, coughing and shuffling on his feet. JACK STRAW looks at him through his eyeglass.*] Won't you introduce your friend to me?

LADY WANLEY.

Mr. Vincent Parker-Jennings.

VINCENT.

I'm very proud and honoured to make your Royal Highness's acquaintance.

JACK STRAW.

It's very polite of you to say so.

VINCENT.

I've always had a great sympathy for Pomerania. Most wonderful country in Europe, that's what I always say.

JACK STRAW.

I will tell my grandfather you think so. He will be pleased and flattered.

VINCENT.

I haven't ever been there, you know, sir. But I know all about it through Adrian von Bremer.

HOLLAND.

[*Hastily.*] Your ambassador lives quite near Mr. Jennings.

JACK STRAW.

Oh yes.

VINCENT.

His place marches with ours, don't you know. He's a great pal of my people's. Jolly old thing, isn't he, sir? Thorough sportsman. That's what I call a gentleman.

JACK STRAW.

I seem to know your name so well.

LADY WANLEY.

Mr. Parker-Jennings is the great philanthropist. He's provided books to put in all Mr. Carnegie's free libraries.

JACK STRAW.

What a noble act. I should very much like to make his acquaintance.

VINCENT.

He's sitting over there with my mother and sister. Shall I go and fetch him, sir?

JACK STRAW.

It's very kind of you to take so much trouble.

HOLLAND.

[*To JACK STRAW in an undertone.*] For goodness sake be careful.

JACK STRAW.

[*Putting up his eyeglass.*] I beg your pardon, I did not catch what you said. . . . Pray repeat it.

HOLLAND.

[*Embarrassed.*] It was of no consequence, sir.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*To VINCENT.*] Who is he, Vincent? I saw 'er curtsy to him.

VINCENT.

Come along, pater. He wants to be introduced to you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I'm coming too, Vincent.

VINCENT.

Awfully jolly chap. Archduke Sebastian. What ho!

PARKER-JENNINGS.

But look here, Vincent, I don't know how to talk to Royalty. How shall I address him?

VINCENT.

Oh, that's all right. Say *Sir* wherever you can slip it in and when you can't say *Royal Highness*.

[JACK STRAW comes forward a little with LADY WANLEY.

LADY WANLEY.

This is Mrs. Parker-Jennings.

JACK STRAW.

[*Shaking hands with her.*] I'm delighted to make your acquaintance. [*Turning to PARKER-JENNINGS.*] I have often heard of you, Mr. . . . Mr. . . .

LADY WANLEY.

[*Prompting.*] Parker-Jennings.

JACK STRAW.

[*With a relieved smile.*] Mr. Parker-Jennings. I'm sure I wish we had in my country more men of your public spirit and disinterestedness.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Very nervously.*] I try to do my little best, you know, sir, your Royal Highness.

JACK STRAW.

Won't you introduce me to your daughter?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

I'm sure, sir, your Royal Highness is very affable.
Ethel!

[ETHEL *slowly comes forward and curtsies. He looks at her steadily, takes her hand and kisses it.*

VINCENT.

[*In an undertone.*] What ho!

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

THE SECOND ACT

The drawing-room at Taverner, the PARKER-JENNINGS' place in Cheshire. Large French windows lead out on to the garden. MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS, magnificently dressed, is standing in the middle of the room. PARKER-JENNINGS comes in, rubbing his hands.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

The band has come, my dear, and they're ready to start playing the moment any one turns up.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

'Ave you told 'em about the Pomeranian anthem?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

What do you think, my dear?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I wish you wouldn't answer me like that. Why don't you say yes or no? I can't abide these city ways of yours.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

I was only being facetious, my dear.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I should 'ave thought you'd learned by now that it's vulgar to be funny. You've never 'eard a duchess make a joke, 'ave you?

VINCENT *comes in*.

VINCENT.

I've just been round the refreshment tents. There's one thing, people can't say we haven't spread ourselves out.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Rubbing his hands.*] I 'aven't spared a single expense. The band's down from London, and the refreshments are from Gunter's. There's not a cigar on the place that cost less than one and six—and that's the wholesale price.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, we've done it well, there's no denying that. I've asked the Withers, Robert. Florrie Withers will be mad with jealousy. I shouldn't wonder if she didn't choke with envy when she swallowed a caviar sandwich.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

It was a rare stroke of business when we got the Archduke to come and stay.

VINCENT.

That's through me, pater. You'd never have known him if I hadn't been on the spot.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

And I've asked Lady Wanley. I just want her to see that I can get on without her. All the county's coming. I sent 'em all cards, whether I knew 'em or not, and they've all accepted.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Don't you remember, Marion, how bucked we were in the old days when Mrs. Bromsgrove came to dine with us, because her husband was on the L.C.C.?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I wish she could see me now. D'you remember 'ow she used to patronise me? I wish all that stuck-up lot on Brixton 'ill was here to see us 'ob-nob with the aristocracy.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

It's the Archduke that done it, my dear.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

What's Serlo now? Marquis of Serlo—pooh. He isn't going to get any more opportunities from me—and if he says anything I'll just send him off with a flea in his ear.

VINCENT.

Draw it mild, mater.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Your mother's a great woman, Vincent. This is the day of her life.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I wish I 'adn't been such a fool as to ask Serlo to stay here. And it's just like that aggravating girl. When I wanted Ethel to marry him, she wouldn't so much as look at him, and now that she can have some one else for the asking, she's with 'im all day.

VINCENT.

Well, I'm for the bird in the hand, mater. The Archduke don't look much like a marrying man to me.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Don't you worry about that, my dear. Every man's a marrying man when he's got a chance of a pretty girl with 'alf a million of money.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Here she is.

ETHEL *comes in with* LORD SERLO.

ETHEL.

The Withers have just motored over, mother.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

They would be first, wouldn't they? I expect Florrie Withers was waiting on the doorstep till the clock struck four. Where's his Royal Highness?

ETHEL.

I don't know at all.

SERLO.

He's asleep in the garden ; he's sittin' in the most comfortable arm-chair in the place, with another for each of his legs, and he's clasping in his hands what looks suspiciously like a very long gin and soda to me.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well, somebody must go and wake him up. I've asked 'alf the county to meet him, and he can't go on sleeping.

JACK STRAW *comes in.*

JACK STRAW.

I say, what have you got a beastly band playing the Pomeranian anthem for? Woke me up. I was having such a jolly sleep too.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Very affably.*] The people are just coming, sir

JACK STRAW.

What people?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

All the very best people in Cheshire, sir—no outsiders to-day. What ho!

JACK STRAW.

Good lord, are you giving a party?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Don't you remember, sir? I asked if I might invite a few friends to meet you.

JACK STRAW.

Oh, yes—Lady Wanley and Holland. I thought we might have a jolly little game of bridge in the garden. What have you got the village band in for?

VINCENT.

That's not the village band, sir. That's the Royal Blue Orchestra.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Cost me £150 to have them down. Special train from London, and I don't know what all.

VINCENT.

Shut up, pater. You needn't tell every one how much you paid for things.

JACK STRAW.

How many do you expect?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh—only my most intimate friends—about. . . .

JACK STRAW.

Yes?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well, about three hundred and fifty.

JACK STRAW.

By George, that's cheerful. D'you want me to shake hands with them all?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

They're the very best people in the county, sir.
Crème de la crème.

*A servant enters to announce MR. and MRS. WITHERS.
They come in.*

SERVANT.

Mr. and Mrs. Withers.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

How d'you do? It's so nice of you to come before any one else.

MRS. WITHERS.

We know you're not used to these grand affairs, Maria, and we thought you might want a couple of old friends to do something for you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, thank you. But there are plenty of servants. May I introduce Mr. and Mrs. Withers to your Royal 'Ighness.

JACK STRAW.

How d'you do.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

We were just going into the garden. I daresay people will begin to come presently.

[*They all go out except* ETHEL *and* LORD SERLO.

SERLO.

I say, I'm going to hook it to-morrow.

ETHEL.

Are you ? I'm very sorry.

SERLO.

I wish I thought that.

ETHEL.

Why are you going so soon ?

SERLO.

Your respected mother has given your humble notice to quit.

ETHEL.

What do you mean ?

SERLO.

Look here, let's be frank with one another, shall we ?

ETHEL.

Aren't we always ?

SERLO.

Well, if you ask me point blank, anythin' but.

ETHEL.

Then let us be frank at once.

SERLO.

Well, ten days ago your people were all over me. I suppose you know why as well as I do.

ETHEL.

D'you think we need talk of that?

SERLO.

Frankness is rather tryin', ain't it?

ETHEL.

No. Please go on.

SERLO.

It was dear Lord Serlo all day long; they couldn't have enough of me. Rippin' good chap, Serlo. Just the sort of cove one would like to have for a son-in-law.

ETHEL.

Lord Serlo!

SERLO.

Half a mo. I ain't done yet. Eminently suitable match, and all that sort of thing, only the young lady couldn't stick me at any price.

ETHEL.

I don't know why you should say this.

SERLO.

Better have it out, you know; rotten, keepin' things on your chest. Don't blame the young lady. Don't know that I should much fancy myself if I was a blushing damsel. Not everybody's money. Got a bit damaged in transit, eh, what? Been mixed up in one or two scandals. Not the right thing for an old-established marquess. Bit inclined to drink. No harm in him, you know, but not the sort of man you'd like to spend the rest of your life with. Young woman got a mind of her own. Lets the noble lord see she wouldn't take him if he was given away with a pound of tea. All right, says noble lord, bet's off. Not much, says mother of young woman. Half a million goin' beggin'. Give her time to get used to you. Fascinating cove really. More she knows you more she'll like you. Come down and stay in the country.

ETHEL.

[*With a laugh.*] How can you talk such nonsense!

SERLO.

All right, says noble lord, I'm on. Jolly nice girl, and all that sort of thing. Noble lord rather smit. Thinks if she'll have him he'll turn over a new leaf—give up everythin' rotten and try and make her a good husband. Rather taken with the idea of double harness. He may look a fool, but noble lord knows a good thing when he sees it, and the young lady's about the best thing he's ever set eyes on.

ETHEL.

Are you talking seriously by any chance?

SERLO.

Now don't interrupt me. I've just got into a good steady canter, and I'll get it all off my chest at once.

ETHEL.

I'm so sorry.

SERLO.

Well, when eligible marquess gets down in the country, what d'you think he finds? Blessed if there ain't a foreign prince on the scene. My word, that's enough to put the noble lord's aristocratic nose right out of joint, ain't it? Look here, old boy, you keep your weather eye open, and all that sort of thing, says the noble lord to himself. May be an ass, don't you know, but when there's a bloomin' hurricane comin' along he can see which way the wind is blowin'. Brother rather chilly, father rather chilly, mother regular iceberg. All right, says noble lord to himself, but what about Pretty Polly?

ETHEL.

Is that me by any chance?

SERLO.

For the last month Pretty Polly had been simply turnin' her back on noble lord, snubbin' him right and left, and all of a sudden she becomes extraordinary affable. Hulloo, what's this, says noble lord, and his

little heart goes pit-a-pat. He may be a fool, but he ain't a damned fool, and in a day or two he tumbles to it. So, like a wise man, he packs his bag and hooks it.

ETHEL.

I don't know what on earth you mean?

SERLO.

Don't you? Well, will you have it straight from the shoulder?

ETHEL.

We agreed to be quite frank.

SERLO.

All right. No spoof. My dear, I just saw that you were fairly knocked silly by the Archduke, and there wasn't a ghost of a chance for little Ned Serlo.

ETHEL.

It's not true.

SERLO.

Oh, yes, it is. You see, I'm a bit knocked silly myself, and that makes you precious far-sighted.

ETHEL.

You!

SERLO

All right, you needn't get up on your hind legs. I'm not goin' to propose to you now. I know it would be no precious good. At first I didn't care twopence; it

was just a business arrangement—half a million down on one side and an old-established marquise on the other. But now. . . . Well, you know I'm rather an ass at saying what I mean—when I really mean it.

ETHEL.

I'm very sorry. I'm afraid I've been unkind to you.

SERLO.

Oh, no, you haven't. I do seem a rotten little bounder, don't I?

ETHEL.

No, I think you might be an awfully good friend.

SERLO.

It's jolly of you to say so. You know, I can't stick your family. Can you?

ETHEL.

[*Smiling.*] You see, I knew them before they were rich. When you've lived all your life in a sordid narrow way, it's very hard to have such enormous wealth as ours.

SERLO.

You make allowances for them, but you never did for me.

ETHEL.

It would have been very impertinent of me.

SERLO.

It never struck you that it's devilish hard to be a marquess with no means of livelihood but your title. And the worst of a title is that it'll get you plenty of credit, but dooced little hard cash.

ETHEL.

I never thought of that.

SERLO.

Well, look here, what I wanted to say is this : it's no business of mine about the Archduke. You know, I don't know much about royalty, but I don't think a foreign prince is likely to marry the daughter of nobody in particular just because she's got nice eyes and a pot of money. [ETHEL *is about to speak.*] No, let me go on. You may be going to have a rotten time, and I just want you to know that if at any time you want me—well, you know what I mean, don't you. Let's forget that you're an heiress, and I'm an old-established marquess. You're an awfully ripping sort, and I'm just Ned Serlo. I'm not a bad sort either, and perhaps we might be happy together.

ETHEL.

[*Touched.*] It's very charming of you. I'm so glad that I know you better know. Whatever happens I know I can count on you.

SERLO.

That's all right then. Meanwhile noble lord's goin' to hook it—leave the coast clear, and bear it like a man, don't you know.

Enter JACK STRAW.

JACK STRAW.

Well, how are the weather and the crops?

SERLO.

[*Rather surprised.*] Blessed if I know, sir.

JACK STRAW.

I merely asked because you looked as if you'd been discussing them.

[*He gives SERLO a glance. SERLO shows no sign of moving.*]

JACK STRAW.

I'm not driving you away, am I?

SERLO.

[*Getting up.*] Not at all, sir. I thought I'd go and have a look at the party.

JACK STRAW.

Do go and pretend you're me, there's a good fellow, and shake hands with some of those confounded people. You'll see where I ought to stand, because there's a little piece of red carpet on the lawn.

SERLO.

I'm afraid they're not takin' any of me, sir. [*Exit.*]

JACK STRAW.

The only advantage I've ever been able to find in being a royal personage is that when anybody's in your way you just tell him to go, and he goes.

ETHEL.

Why did you want Lord Serlo to go, sir?

JACK STRAW.

Because I wanted to be alone with you. Ask me another, quickly.

ETHEL.

Oughtn't I to help mother to receive people?

JACK STRAW.

I'm sure you ought. But, you see, that's another advantage of being a royal personage, that you can't go till I give you your dismissal. I say, don't you hate parties?

ETHEL.

Dreadfully.

JACK STRAW.

So do I. Let's pretend there isn't one, shall we? I say, why don't you sit down and make yourself comfy?

ETHEL.

I should like to have a little talk with you, sir.

JACK STRAW.

That's jolly. I wish we had a regiment of soldiers there to turn all those people out

ETHEL.

May I say anything I like to you, sir?

JACK STRAW.

Good heavens, why not?

ETHEL.

Until I was sixteen the most exalted person I'd ever met in my life was a London County Councillor. I'm not quite sure if I know how to behave with royal personages.

JACK STRAW.

Why on earth don't you buy a book on etiquette? I always carry one about with me.

ETHEL.

Mother bought several when you said you'd come down.

JACK STRAW.

I wonder if she's got the same as mine. You know I never can remember to call a serviette a napkin.

ETHEL.

Mamma's very particular about that.

JACK STRAW.

And look here, d'you know that you ought never to call a chicken a fowl? It's awfully bad form. I wonder if that's in your mother's books. I say, what charming eyes you have.

ETHEL.

That's another of the advantages of being a royal personage, that you can make pretty speeches, and no one takes them seriously.

JACK STRAW.

But you know, I'm a very insignificant royal personage. You mustn't think I'm anything very grand really.

ETHEL.

It's very nice of you to say so.

JACK STRAW.

You see, there are seventy-nine archdukes and duchesses in Pomerania. My grandfather had seventeen children, and they all married. How many children would each have had to make seventy-nine of us?

ETHEL.

It sounds very difficult.

JACK STRAW.

But you see I can't be very important, can I? And of course I've got practically no money to speak of.

ETHEL.

It's very good of you to put me at my ease. Then you won't mind if I say exactly what I want to?

JACK STRAW.

You won't give me good advice, will you? I've got seventy-nine relations, and they all do that.

ETHEL.

I wouldn't venture.

JACK STRAW.

I'll bear whatever else you say with fortitude. We'll pretend that you're just Miss So-and-So.

ETHEL.

As in point of fact, I am.

JACK STRAW.

And that I'm—Jack Straw.

ETHEL.

[*Surprised.*] Why on earth Jack Straw?

JACK STRAW.

[*Indifferently.*] It's the name of a public-house in Hampstead. Pray go on.

ETHEL.

I wondered if you'd do me a great favour.

JACK STRAW.

Ask me for the moon, and it shall be left at your front door by Carter Paterson to-morrow morning.

ETHEL.

It's something much simpler than that.

JACK STRAW.

Put me out of suspense quickly.

ETHEL.

I should be very much obliged if—if you'd go away.

JACK STRAW.

[*Much surprised.*] I? Now?

ETHEL.

I didn't mean actually this minute. But if it suited your arrangements to go to-morrow. . . .

JACK STRAW.

You don't mean to say you want me to go away altogether?

ETHEL.

That is precisely what I did mean.

JACK STRAW.

Couldn't you ask me something easier than that? Ask me for a lawyer who never told a lie, and I'll deliver him to you, bound hand and foot.

ETHEL.

I don't happen to want one just at this moment, thank you.

JACK STRAW.

But I'm having a very jolly time down here.

ETHEL.

[*With a change of tone.*] Don't you see that you're exposing me every day to the most cruel humiliation?

JACK STRAW.

I thought I was making myself so pleasant.

ETHEL.

Oh, don't pretend you don't understand. I've seen the twinkle in your eyes when my mother set a little trap for you to fall in.

JACK STRAW.

I always fall in very neatly.

ETHEL.

But what do you think I felt when I knew how clearly you saw that she was throwing me at your head?

JACK STRAW.

It's a distinctly pleasing sensation to have a pretty girl thrown at your head.

ETHEL.

It was only a joke to you ; you don't know how ashamed I was.

JACK STRAW.

But why do you suppose I came down to Taverner—to see your father and mother?

ETHEL.

I don't know why you came—unless it was to make me desperately wretched.

JACK STRAW.

What would you say if I told you that I came because I loved you at first sight?

ETHEL.

I should say that your Royal Highness was very polite.

JACK STRAW.

Now, look here, don't you think I'm rather nice, really?

ETHEL.

It would surely be very impertinent of me to have any opinion on the subject.

JACK STRAW.

Our friend Serlo would describe that as one in the eye.

ETHEL.

Would you allow me to go back to my mother's guests, sir?

JACK STRAW.

[*Imperturbably.*] Do you think you'd like me any better if I weren't an Archduke?

ETHEL.

I haven't thought about it.

JACK STRAW.

Then please give the matter your immediate attention.

ETHEL.

I should certainly like you no less.

JACK STRAW.

I have no doubt that if I were just a penniless adventurer you'd simply dote upon me.

ETHEL.

I don't know if I'd put it quite so strongly as that.

JACK STRAW.

You know, I'm afraid you're hopelessly romantic. You've confessed your attachment to me, and just because I happen incautiously to have chosen an Emperor for my grandfather, you want me to go away. It's so unreasonable.

ETHEL.

But I haven't confessed anything of the sort.

JACK STRAW.

I look upon your request that I should go away as equivalent to an avowal of undying passion.

ETHEL.

Shall I tell you what I would say to you if you weren't an Archduke?

JACK STRAW.

Yes.

ETHEL.

I'd say you were the most audacious, impudent, and impertinent man I'd ever seen in my life.

[She gives a rapid, ironical curtsy, and goes out. He is about to follow her when LADY WANLEY and HOLLAND come in. JACK STRAW stops and shakes hands with them.]

JACK STRAW.

Ah, I was hoping to have the pleasure of seeing you. You wrote me a little note, Mr. Holland.

HOLLAND.

[*Ironically.*] I ventured to ask if I might have a few minutes' private conversation with you.

JACK STRAW.

Perhaps you wouldn't mind waiting here. I will rejoin you immediately. [*He goes out.*]

HOLLAND.

You know, he positively freezes me.

LADY WANLEY.

I think it's wonderful. One couldn't suspect for a moment that he's only. . . .

HOLLAND.

Take care.

[*He looks round.*]

LADY WANLEY.

No one will come here. We can talk quite safely.

HOLLAND.

I wish to goodness we hadn't ever thought of this fool trick. I knew it would lead to all sorts of bother.

LADY WANLEY.

It's no good saying that now. We must keep our heads and get out of it as best we can.

HOLLAND.

What are you going to do?

LADY WANLEY.

Oh, that's just like a man. You're trying to put the whole blame on me. What are *you* going to do?

HOLLAND.

Well, we must finish with it as quickly as we can.

LADY WANLEY.

Whatever happens, there must be no scene. I couldn't bear to see him publicly humiliated.

HOLLAND.

Why on earth should you think of him?

LADY WANLEY.

Oh, I'm such a fool, Ambrose.

HOLLAND.

My dear, what *do* you mean?

LADY WANLEY.

After all, I'm not a girl—I'm the mother of two healthy boys with enormous appetites. I think the man has bewitched me.

HOLLAND.

Good Lord!

LADY WANLEY.

It's no good saying that. Of course he's the most fascinating creature I've ever seen in my life.

HOLLAND.

You don't mean to say you're seriously in love with him?

LADY WANLEY.

A widow with a sense of humour is never seriously in love with anybody.

HOLLAND.

Well?

LADY WANLEY.

But I think it's much better the young man should disappear as mysteriously as he came.

HOLLAND.

There we're quite agreed. And we'll tell him so with considerable frankness.

Enter JACK STRAW.

JACK STRAW.

Now, my dear people, I am at your service.

[HOLLAND and LADY WANLEY are sitting down.

JACK STRAW looks at HOLLAND, who rises uneasily.

HOLLAND.

Oh, don't be such an ass, Jack.

JACK STRAW.

[Frigidly.] I beg your pardon. *[Pause.]* Perhaps you'd be good enough to put down my hat.

[HOLLAND takes it and flings it crossly on a chair.

JACK STRAW.

I don't think you're in a very good humour this afternoon, Mr. Holland. I venture to think your manners leave something to be desired.

HOLLAND.

Look here, we've had enough of this tomfoolery.

JACK STRAW.

Pray sit down. It distresses me to see you standing.

HOLLAND.

I believe the man's out of his senses.

LADY WANLEY.

[*Very amiably.*] Have you forgotten the waiter's uniform which fitted you so wonderfully, Mr. Straw?

JACK STRAW.

[*Calmly.*] Quite. I only remember the condition your ladyship was good enough to agree to, when I accepted your humorous suggestion.

HOLLAND.

But, look here, we must talk the matter out.

JACK STRAW.

I am quite willing to listen to you, my dear Holland. Your conversation is often interesting and sometimes epigrammatic. I stipulate only that you should use

those forms of politeness which are usual between a person of your position and a person of mine.

HOLLAND.

I should never have consented to this folly if I'd known to what it was going to lead. In a moment of uncontrollable irritation, because Mrs. Jennings had behaved with the greatest insolence to a defenceless girl, we made up our minds to punish her. There was no great harm in it. We thought perhaps she'd ask you to dinner, and there would be an end of it. It never dawned on us that you'd come and stay here indefinitely.

JACK STRAW.

My dear fellow, why should you blame me for your own lack of intelligence?

HOLLAND.

[*Impatiently.*] Ugh!

[JACK STRAW goes over and sits beside LADY WANLEY.

JACK STRAW.

Our friend is quite incoherent, isn't he?

LADY WANLEY.

We want you to go away, sir.

JACK STRAW.

Do you? I say, what a jolly frock. Where did you get it?

LADY WANLEY.

[*With a little laugh, disarmed by his impudence,*]
You're perfectly irresistible.

JACK STRAW.

You've taken the words out of my mouth, that's just what I was going to say to you.

LADY WANLEY.

Are you ever serious?

JACK STRAW.

Always when I'm talking to a pretty woman.

LADY WANLEY.

I wish I could understand you.

JACK STRAW.

My dear lady, I've been trying to understand myself for the last thirty odd years. By the way, how old am I, Holland?

HOLLAND.

How the deuce should I know?

JACK STRAW.

Well, my dear fellow, I think it's very careless of you. You might have looked it out. Supposing some one had asked me my age?

LADY WANLEY.

I wish you really were a royal personage.

JACK STRAW.

It does seem hard that a waiter should have such a way with him, doesn't it ?

LADY WANLEY.

[*Confidentially.*] Who are you really ?

JACK STRAW.

Your devoted servant, madam. Who could be anything else after knowing you for ten minutes ?

LADY WANLEY.

It's charming of you to say so.

JACK STRAW.

I am very nice, aren't I ?

LADY WANLEY.

Much too nice. That is why I beseech your Royal Highness graciously to take his departure.

JACK STRAW.

You know, you haven't yet told me where you got that frock.

LADY WANLEY.

Oh, I bought it in Paris. Do you like it ?

JACK STRAW.

It's ripping. And it suits you admirably.

HOLLAND.

Isabel, Isabel, we came here to be sensible.

LADY WANLEY.

My dear Ambrose, let me be sensible in my own way.

JACK STRAW.

Oh, my dear Holland, I wonder if you'd very much mind going to see if my red carpet is still in its place.

HOLLAND.

I'm not going to be made a fool of by you, my friend.

JACK STRAW.

Why not? You're doing it very well.

LADY WANLEY.

Don't be piggy, Ambrose.

HOLLAND.

What on earth do you want me to do?

LADY WANLEY.

I'm simply dying of thirst. I wish you'd get me a glass of lemonade.

HOLLAND.

I have no intention whatever of stirring from this spot.

JACK STRAW.

I've been wondering for the last week what I should do if I signified his dismissal to any one, and he flatly refused to go. Very awkward, isn't it?

LADY WANLEY.

Mahomet and the mountain isn't in it.

JACK STRAW.

Of course a hundred years ago I'd have cast him into a dungeon. But, between ourselves, I don't happen to have a dungeon handy.

HOLLAND.

Now look here, we've had enough of this nonsense. The joke has gone far enough. Are you going or not?

JACK STRAW.

Well, if you ask me point blank, I'm not.

HOLLAND.

But don't you know that I have only to say two words for you to be kicked out of the house by the servants?

JACK STRAW.

You forget that you'd be undoubtedly kicked out with me.

HOLLAND.

Now look here, Jack, we've been old pals, and we've gone through a deuce of a lot together. I don't want

to say beastly things to you. I know I've made a fool of myself, but you're a decent chap. You must see that it's necessary for you to go at once.

JACK STRAW.

I cannot for the life of me see anything of the sort. I have no other engagements, and the country is charming at this time of year.

HOLLAND.

You're behaving like a common impostor.

JACK STRAW.

What language to use to a royal personage! I assure you we're not used to such frankness.

HOLLAND.

Do you deliberately refuse to go?

JACK STRAW.

Deliberately.

HOLLAND.

And shall I tell you why?

JACK STRAW.

I happen to know, thank you.

HOLLAND.

You're going to commit the most disgraceful action of your life. Do you think any one can't see that you're madly in love with Ethel Jennings?

LADY WANLEY.

[*Springing to her feet.*] Is that true?

JACK STRAW.

Quite.

LADY WANLEY.

Then why have you been flirting with me so disgracefully?

JACK STRAW.

I assure you I had no intention of doing so. It must be my unfortunate manner.

LADY WANLEY.

It's an unfortunate manner that's quite likely to get you into trouble with widow ladies.

JACK STRAW.

In that case you can only applaud my determination to marry as quickly as possible.

HOLLAND.

Not Ethel Jennings?

LADY WANLEY.

You must be joking?

JACK STRAW.

My dear madam, when I make a joke I always laugh quickly, so that there should be no doubt about it.

HOLLAND.

It's preposterous. I shall allow you to do nothing of the sort.

JACK STRAW.

My dear fellow, what is the use of getting violently excited about it? More especially as I haven't yet proposed to the young lady.

HOLLAND.

I think you must bestark staring mad. You don't suppose for a moment that we shall allow you to carry out such an odious deception. I can't imagine how you can even think of anything so heartless and cruel.

LADY WANLEY.

It's going too far. You must understand that it's impossible. I beseech you to leave Taverner immediately.

JACK STRAW.

It drives me to distraction that I should have to refuse your smallest whim, but in this matter [*with a dramatic flourish*] I am adamant.

HOLLAND.

Now, look here, we've talked about it enough. Either you leave this place immediately or I shall tell Mrs. Jennings the whole story.

JACK STRAW.

It is only fair to give you that satisfaction. That was part of our arrangement.

HOLLAND.

You realise the consequences ?

JACK STRAW.

[*Very amiably.*] I did that before I entered into your scheme.

HOLLAND.

You leave me no alternative.

JACK STRAW.

My dear Holland, I really believe you're rather nervous about the disclosure which it is evidently your duty to make.

HOLLAND.

For your own sake I ask you once more : will you give me your word of honour to leave the house and under no circumstances communicate with any member of the family ?

JACK STRAW.

It's charming of you to give me one more chance. I can only repeat that I am deeply in love with Ethel, and I have every intention of marrying her.

HOLLAND.

Your blood be upon your own head.

JACK STRAW.

If I perish, I perish.

[HOLLAND goes to the door.

LADY WANLEY.

No, Ambrose, I beseech you not to.

HOLLAND.

Good heavens, the whole thing was done so that you might have an opportunity to crow over Mrs. Jennings. Now you're going to have it.

LADY WANLEY.

But I don't want it any more. It was a foolish thing. Let him go quietly.

HOLLAND.

But, you see, he won't go.

Enter Mr. and Mrs. PARKER-JENNINGS.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, your Royal 'Ighness, we've been looking for you everywhere. We couldn't make out what 'ad become of you.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

All the county is there. *Crème de la crème.*

VINCENT comes in hurriedly.

VINCENT.

I say, mater, what on earth are you doing? Hurry up, the duchess has just driven up. . . . Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. I didn't know you were there.

HOLLAND.

Vincent, go and fetch your sister. I have something important to say that it is necessary for her to hear.

VINCENT.

But look here, the duchess has just. . . .

HOLLAND.

Oh, hang the duchess. Where's Ethel?

VINCENT.

She's sitting just outside, talking to Serlo.

HOLLAND.

Then call her.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Looking round with astonishment.*] 'As anythin' appened?

[*VINCENT goes out, and in a moment returns with ETHEL and SERLO.*

LADY WANLEY.

[*To HOLLAND.*] Ambrose, be gentle.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Your Royal Highness isn't put out about anything?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Quickly.*] Oh, I 'ope we 'aven't made any *faux pas*.

JACK STRAW.

Nothing has happened to displease me. I'm in the best possible humour, thank you.

HOLLAND.

[*Seeing* ETHEL.] Oh, there you are. [*Addressing himself to the company in general.*] I have something very painful to say, and I don't know how I'm going to make it clear to you.

SERLO.

I say, is this any business of mine? Shall I hook it?

JACK STRAW.

Oh no, pray stay by all means.

LADY WANLEY.

[*To* JACK STRAW.] Haven't you changed your mind, sir?

JACK STRAW.

I'm like a historical character whose name I can't remember at the moment: I never change my mind.

HOLLAND.

Mrs. Jennings, I'm afraid there's no use in my trying to excuse myself. I had better just tell you everything as shortly as I can.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Mr. Holland, don't you think it can wait till later? The duchess 'as just come, and it'll look so funny if I'm not there to receive her.

JACK STRAW.

Mr. Holland has a communication to make which cannot fail to interest you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, of course, if it's your Royal 'Ighness's wish.

HOLLAND.

I daresay you remember that a fortnight ago we all met at the Grand Babylon Hotel.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

How could I forget, when that was the auspicious occasion of my introduction to his Royal 'Ighness.

LADY WANLEY.

Ambrose.

HOLLAND.

You may remember, also, that Mr. and Mrs. Abbott were sitting with us in the lounge.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I 'ave other things to do than to remember where Mr. and Mrs. Abbott were sitting.

HOLLAND.

I daresay you've forgotten that you behaved very cruelly to her. We were all very indignant. We thought it necessary to punish you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Really, Mr. Holland, I don't know who you think you're talking to.

HOLLAND.

I find it very difficult to say what I have to—I realise now that the whole business has been preposterously silly—I can manage far better if you don't interrupt.

JACK STRAW.

Please let him go on, Mrs. Jennings.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Of, of course, if your Royal 'Ighness wishes it I 'ave no more to say.

HOLLAND.

It struck me that it would be amusing to pass off a nobody as a person of great consequence. I had just recognised one of the waiters as an old friend of mine. I introduced him to you as the Archduke Sebastian of Pomerania.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

What! Then. . . ?

[*She is at a loss for words. SERLO goes into a shout of laughter.*

SERLO.

What a sell! By George, what a sell!

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Going up to JACK STRAW.*] Do you mean to say you're not. . . .

VINCENT.

I thought I knew his face the moment I saw him.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Speak, man, speak.

*These four
speeches are said
very quickly,
almost
simultaneously.*

JACK STRAW.

[*With the greatest urbanity.*] Madam, I stepped out of the uniform of a waiter at the Grand Babylon Hotel into the sober garb of the person you now see before you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Then you're nothing short of an impostor. Oh! Oh! Now, then, Jennings, you're a man. Do something.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

And he's been lappin' up my best champagne lunch and dinner for a week.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, damn your champagne.

VINCENT.

Mater!

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, you fool, you fool! You've 'ad the education. You've been to Oxford, and we gave you four thousand a year. Didn't you learn enough to tell the difference between an archduke and a waiter?

VINCENT.

Serlo didn't spot him.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Who's Serlo? Fine marquess he is—spends all his time with stable boys and barmaids. How do I know he is a marquess?

SERLO.

Don't mind me, will you?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Is there no one who can do something? And that man stands there as if he didn't care a ball of worsted. Don't you be too sure, my young friend. It's your Royal 'Ighness this, and your Royal 'Ighness that. And we

had to call you sir. Waiter, 'alf a pint of bitter, and look sharp about it.

ETHEL.

Mother!

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, don't talk to me. [*To JACK STRAW.*] Well, what have you got to say?

JACK STRAW.

My dear lady, you're so voluble, it would be difficult for me to get a word in edgeways.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well, I'm listening.

JACK STRAW.

Ah, there you have me, for in point of fact I can think of no appropriate observation.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

And you've been laughing at me all the time, 'ave you? Well, you're going to laugh on the other side of your face now, young feller-my-lad.

JACK STRAW.

I shall be interested to see how one performs that very curious operation.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well, shall I tell you who'll show you?

JACK STRAW.

Yes, do.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

The police, my lad, the police.

JACK STRAW.

I wouldn't send for them if I were you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Wouldn't you?

JACK STRAW.

I wouldn't really.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well, I would.

JACK STRAW.

Don't you think it'll be a little awkward with all these people here?

VINCENT.

We can't have a scene now, mater.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

D'you mean to say I've got to sit still and lump it?

JACK STRAW.

If you ask my advice, that is what I should recommend.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

All the county's here, Maria. *Crème de la crème.*

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, I wish they were all dead. I know why they come here. D'you think I don't know that they call me a vulgar old woman behind my back? But they come all the same because I've got two millions of money. I'm so rich that they can't 'elp coming.

JACK STRAW.

You know, I don't want to seem stuck up, but in point of fact they've come to-day to meet me. Don't you think I'd better go and make myself amiable to them?

HOLLAND.

You don't mean to say you're going back to them?

JACK STRAW.

Why not?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

'Ave I got to introduce you to the duchess?

JACK STRAW.

I'm afraid she'll make a point of it. Even duchesses have a weakness for royal personages.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

If she ever finds out!

JACK STRAW.

The situation is not without an element of humour.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well, upon my soul, you 'ave got a cheek!

JACK STRAW.

The motto on my coat of arms is audacity. Only we put it in Latin because it sounds better.

VINCENT.

Your coat of arms, I like that.

JACK STRAW.

My dear fellow, I have no doubt it is as authentic as yours.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

And do you mean to say I've got to pretend I don't know anything?

JACK STRAW.

I think it's the only thing to do.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I can never do it. I shall never 'old up my 'ead again.

JACK STRAW.

Come. I am convinced that the duchess is growing restive. I will murmur a few soft nothings in her ear.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, well, I suppose the only thing is to risk it. But you just wait, young man, you wait.

JACK STRAW.

I think I can promise you that no one here will—
blow the gaff.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Upon my soul, you talk as if I was the criminal.
[*She starts and stops suddenly with a cry.*]

HOLLAND.

What's the matter?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, it give me such a turn. What's to be done
now? The Count.

HOLLAND.

How d'you mean?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I'd forgotten all about him. Count von Bremer is
coming.

JACK STRAW.

Who the deuce is he?

HOLLAND.

He's your ambassador.

JACK STRAW.

Of course, how stupid of me!

LADY WANLEY.

[*With a little scornful smile.*] But he won't come.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Don't you make too sure about that. He's coming right enough. The British aristocracy was quite willing to 'ob-nob with the Parker-Jennings, but this dirty foreigner wouldn't be seen in the same street with us. And you all sniggered up your sleeves, because you thought you was getting a bit of your own back. But I've got 'im to-day, and I was going to fling him in your faces. I wrote 'im a personal letter—as if I'd known him all my life—and said, . .

JACK STRAW.

Well ?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

And said 'is Royal 'Ighness particularly wished him to come. I sent the letter by one of the footmen this morning.

JACK STRAW.

By Jove !

HOLLAND.

Well, they mustn't meet. You must say that the Archduke has been seized with sudden indisposition.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Every one knows he was quite well half an hour ago.

LADY WANLEY.

Besides, Count von Bremer would probably insist on seeing him. It must have come as a great surprise that the Archduke Sebastian had turned up.

JACK STRAW.

My dear people, don't put yourselves out. If Count von Bremer has come here to see me, it would be manifestly most discourteous to rob him of that pleasure.

HOLLAND.

I think you're quite mad, Jack.

JACK STRAW.

Unless I'm greatly mistaken, Count von Bremer has excessively bad sight.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

You don't mean to say you're going to meet 'im face to face?

JACK STRAW.

Remember that there are eighty-one Archdukes in Pomerania.

ETHEL.

You told me seventy-nine a little while ago.

JACK STRAW.

I have since seen in the paper that the Archduchess Anastasia has had twins, which makes eighty-one. What more probable than that the Ambassador has never seen the Archduke Sebastian?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, but what a risk to take. It's enough to turn my false 'air grey.

JACK STRAW.

In any case, he can't have set eyes on him for four years, because nobody has.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I suppose it 'asn't struck you that he may talk to you in Pomeranian.

JACK STRAW.

Have you ever met a waiter who couldn't discourse fluently in seven languages at least?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Does that mean you can talk the Count's beastly language?

JACK STRAW.

Like a beastly native, madam. But I may suggest to you that there will be no need, since if I address the Count in English it would be the height of discourtesy for him to answer in any other tongue.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well, of all the cheek I've ever come across in my life, you just about take the cake.

HOLLAND.

But look here, I remember seeing the Archduke described as a very handsome man.

JACK STRAW.

Spare my blushes, dear friend. We are as like as two peas.

MRS. WITHERS *comes in*.

MRS. WITHERS.

Maria, the Count is looking for you everywhere.
[*Seeing JACK STRAW.*] Oh, I beg your pardon, sir.

JACK STRAW.

Not at all.

MRS. WITHERS.

He's just coming along with Mr. Withers.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*In an aside to JACK STRAW.*] Try and behave like a gentleman,

Enter COUNT ADRIAN VON BREMER *and* WITHERS.

JACK STRAW.

My dear Count!

COUNT.

This is a welcome surprise, sir.

JACK STRAW.

You know my hostess?

COUNT.

[*Shaking hands with* MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.] How do you do?

JACK STRAW.

It is many years since we met.

COUNT.

I should have never recognised you, sir.

JACK STRAW.

I expect I had a moustache when you last saw me.

COUNT.

That changes a face so much. And then I am so blind nowadays.

JACK STRAW.

I daresay you have later news of the Emperor than I.

COUNT.

It will be a great pleasure to His Majesty to know that you are in England, sir. I have ventured to telegraph to him.

JACK STRAW.

Have you, by Jove!

COUNT.

It was my duty to do so.

JACK STRAW.

I daresay you have several things you want to talk to me about?

COUNT.

I was hoping you would give me a few minutes conversation.

JACK STRAW.

[*To* MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.] Will you forgive us if we take a little stroll in the rose garden?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Grinly.*] I am much honoured, sir, that your Royal Highness should condescend to walk in my rose garden.

JACK STRAW.

Come. [*He takes the COUNT's arm. At the door the COUNT hesitates.*] [*Motioning to him to go first.*] No, I pray you. I am at home here—the most comfortable, hospitable home I have known for many a long day.

COUNT.

Do you propose to stay in these parts much longer, sir?

JACK STRAW.

I shall stay till Mrs. Parker-Jennings turns me out.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

You do us a great honour, sir. [*The COUNT goes out. Just as he is going JACK STRAW turns round and gives MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS an elaborate wink.*] [*Furiously.*] You, you, you, you, damned waiter!

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

THE THIRD ACT

The SCENE is the same as in the preceding Act.

Next morning.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS and VINCENT are discovered.

VINCENT

Where's the governor?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

He's 'aving an interview with the waiter.

VINCENT.

I hope he'll give him what for.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

You trust your father for that. Oh, I thought I should never get through last night. Eighteen people to dinner, and me on pins and needles the whole time.

VINCENT.

There's a ripping long account of the Garden Party in the *Cheshire Times*.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Do you think I've not seen it?

VINCENT.

It went off beautifully; no one can deny that
There wasn't a hitch.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*With a little cry of rage.*] Oh!

Enter MR. PARKER-JENNINGS.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Apologetically.*] My dear.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Indignantly.*] You've been and gone and made
another old fool of yourself, Jennings.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*With a deprecating laugh.*] I'm afraid it's the same
old fool as usual, Maria.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Don't make jokes at me, Robert. Keep them for
your City friends.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

He's had breakfast.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

'As he indeed. At 'alf-past eleven. He's not putting himself out, is he?

VINCENT.

When's he going, father?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

It isn't a question of when he's going. Your father went to him and said he was to clear out before twelve o'clock or we'd send for the police, come what might. That's what you told him, Robert, isn't it?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well, my dear. . . .

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

You always were a fool, Jennings. What have you done now?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well, my dear, he insisted on having one of the footmen in the room. He said he didn't like this English habit of ours of having no servants at the breakfast-table.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

You don't mean to say you let him order my servants about?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

My dear, what could I do? There was one of them in the room at the time.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

And you sat by while he ate his breakfast?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

He has a very healthy appetite, Maria.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Don't talk to me. You must 'ave 'ad some opportunity to give him a piece of your mind.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well, my dear, we were left alone for a minute.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Helplessly.*] He was so affable that. . . .

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Affable! Oh, you blithering fool. Wait till I get a word with him.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well, my dear, why didn't you get rid of him last night?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

How could I get rid of 'im last night, with eighteen people come to dinner to meet 'im?

VINCENT.

What about Lady Wanley?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, I never want to set eyes on her again. I know she was at the bottom of this.

VINCENT.

But I thought you'd sent for her.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

So I 'ave, and for Holland too. They got us into the mess, and they must get us out of it. It's just as bad for them as for us now. That's one comfort.

JACK STRAW *comes in, in flannels, looking very cool and comfortable.*

JACK STRAW.

Hulloa, there you are! I was just hunting around for some one to give me a cigarette.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Ironically.*] I 'ope you 'ad a comfortable breakfast.

JACK STRAW.

A 1, thanks. Give me a cigarette, old man?

[VINCENT *is helping himself to one, and JACK STRAW takes the case out of his hand, helps himself, and returns it.*

VINCENT.

Don't mind me, will you?

JACK STRAW.

Not at all.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Aggressively.*] Well?

JACK STRAW.

Jolly party you gave yesterday, Mrs. Jennings. It was a great success, wasn't it? [*Turning to PARKER-JENNINGS.*] By the way, what was that port we drank last night?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

No, you don't, my friend. You may be able to bluff Jennings, but you don't bluff me.

JACK STRAW.

Bluff? Bluff? I flatter myself on my knowledge of English, but I don't think I've ever come across that word.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Haven't you? Perhaps you 'aven't come across the word skilly either? But, unless you look out, you'll know what it is before you want to.

JACK STRAW.

You talk in riddles, dear lady. I always think it a fatiguing habit.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, I'll make myself clear. Don't you 'ave any fear about that

JACK STRAW.

[*Sitting down lazily.*] I can't help feeling the interval between breakfast and luncheon in a country house is one of the most agreeable moments of the day.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

See that there's no one about, Vincent.

VINCENT.

It's all right, mater.

JACK STRAW.

[*Looking at him blandly.*] You have all the airs of a conspirator in a romantic play, my friend. You only want a false beard and some blue spectacles to make the picture perfect.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Now then, you listen to me, young man.

JACK STRAW.

You flatter me, madam.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

We've talked it over, my 'usband and me, and we're no fools, whatever you may think. You richly deserve to be 'anded over to the police.

JACK STRAW.

One moment. To which character are you now addressing yourself, to the Archduke Sebastian or the waiter from the Grand Babylon Hotel?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, if you don't take care, I'll give you such a box on the ears.

JACK STRAW.

You certainly wouldn't do that to a royal personage, would you? You must be concerned for the moment with Jack Straw.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

It may surprise you, but I 'ave been for the last 'alf hour.

JACK STRAW.

I thought your manner had been a little abrupt.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I was saying that you richly deserved to be 'anded over to the police.

JACK STRAW.

There may be two opinions on that question, but we will let it pass.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

But we don't want a scandal.

JACK STRAW.

One has to be so careful in the smart set, doesn't one?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

And we're willing to let you go. Your luggage shall be packed, the motor shall take you to the station.

VINCENT.

Mother, we shall all have to see him off, or it'll look so fishy.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, we'll see him off. Anything to get rid of 'im safely. There's a train in an hour from now. And I 'ave only one piece of advice to you, and that is, take the chance while you've got it.

JACK STRAW.

It's very kind of you, but I'm extremely comfortable here.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

You make me laugh.

JACK STRAW.

I always think it hard that it should be so difficult to make people do that when you're trying to be funny, and so easy when you're trying to be serious

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

You don't want me to tell my footman to take you by the scruff of the neck, and, . . .

JACK STRAW.

My dear lady, let us keep perfectly calm. It would become neither of us to lose our tempers.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Do you mean to say you won't go?

JACK STRAW.

You put it in such a brutal way. Let us say rather, that I cannot tear myself away from your hospitable roof.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Ha, and how long do you propose to give us the honour of your company?

JACK STRAW.

Well, I really haven't quite made up my mind. I'm proposing to await developments.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Send for the police, Robert. I won't put up with it

VINCENT.

You know, mother. . . .

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Hold your tongue, Vincent. . . . [*To JACK STRAW.*] Oh, my friend, I'm sorry for you. Those nice white hands of yours will look pretty after they've been picking oakum for six months.

JACK STRAW.

I had an idea that had been abolished in England.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh no, I think not.

JACK STRAW.

Ah, perhaps it was the treadmill I was thinking of.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well, Vincent, 'ow much longer are you going to stand there like a stuffed owl?

JACK STRAW.

Do my eyes deceive me, or is that a local paper that I see? [*He takes it up.*] Ah, I surmised that it would have an account of your garden party. Two columns of it, by Jove! You must wish you hadn't asked so many people. [*Reading.*] The Duchess of St. Erth, the Marchioness of Mereston, the Marquess of Mereston, Lord and Lady Hollington, Viscount Parnaby—dear me, how smart—Lady Wanley, Mr. and Mrs. Lamberville, the Bishop of Sheffield, and the Honourable Mrs. Spratte. . . . I say, won't your humbler friends grind their teeth with envy. But doesn't it say anything about me? Here it is. [*Reading.*] "The Archduke Sebastian looked every inch a prince." I said so. [*Reading to himself.*] Oh, spare my blushes. [*Aloud.*] "His Royal Highness enchanted every one by the grace of his bearing and the charm of his Imperial personality." Blood will tell.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*To PARKER-JENNINGS.*] Are you going to stand there and let this man insult me, Robert?

JACK STRAW.

[*Blandly.*] And what do you imagine all these noble and distinguished persons will think when they read in the next number of the local paper that the royal personage whose hand they were so pleased to shake—I did my duty like a hero, didn't I?—was serving coffee and liqueurs a fortnight ago in the Grand Babylon Hotel?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, be quiet, you. . . .

JACK STRAW.

I can hear a titter rising softly in the village, with the doctor and the parson and the solicitor, whom you didn't ask to your party, and I can hear it increase to a ripple of laughter as the story spreads through Cheshire. I can hear a Homeric peal as it travels from county to county. It's a great guffaw in Manchester and Liverpool and the cities of the North, and already I hear the deep laughter of Bristol and Portsmouth and the West. And when it reaches London—you know how things go in London, it's so large that it takes it a little time really to get hold of anything, but when at last it comes, can't you see the huge city holding its aching sides and bellowing with laughter. But I'll tell you who won't see the joke—[*taking up the paper and reading*]*—oh, they'll laugh very much on the wrong side of their mouths; the Duchess of St. Erth, the Marchioness of Mereston, and my Lady Hollington and my Lord Parnaby, and the Bishop of Sheffield and the Honourable Mrs. Spratte.*

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, you devil!

JACK STRAW.

I can see you flying before the laughter like three tremulous leaves before the wind, and the laughter will pursue you to Paris, where they'll make little songs about you on the boulevards, and the Riviera, where they'll sell your photographs on picture post-cards. I can see you fleeing across the Atlantic to hide your heads in the immensity of America, and there the Yellow Press, pea-green with frenzy, will pile column of ridicule upon column of invective. Oh, my dear lady, do you think it isn't worth while to endure six months hard labour to amuse the world so profoundly?

[There is a silence. PARKER-JENNINGS takes out his handkerchief, makes it into a ball and mops his forehead. VINCENT, noticing him, does the same. MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS gives the two a glance, sees what they are doing, takes out her handkerchief, rolls it up ball, and slowly mops her forehead.]

PARKER-JENNINGS.

It's no good, Maria; we can't give him in charge.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Tell me something I don't know. We're in the man's hands, and he knows it.

JACK STRAW.

[*With an amiable smile.*] I thought you would come to see the situation from my point of view.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Beaten.*] What are you going to do?

JACK STRAW.

At the present moment, with your permission, I am going to have a small brandy and soda. Ring the bell, Vincent.

VINCENT.

Shall I, ma?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*With angry resignation.*] Oh, yes, ring it.

JACK STRAW.

For your own sake, I warn you to behave with the utmost decorum before the servant.

[*A FOOTMAN appears.*]

PARKER-JENNINGS

Bring his Royal Highness a brandy and soda, James.

SERVANT.

Very good, sir.

[*Exit.*]

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, I wish it would choke you.

JACK STRAW.

I'm afraid I can hold out no hope of that.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Now, look here, I'm no fool, Mr.— I don't know what to call you. . . .

JACK STRAW.

You'll find it'll be more convenient to address me as you have always done.

VINCENT.

The cheek of it ! I can see myself saying sir to a damned waiter.

JACK STRAW.

You were assuring me that you were no fool madam.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

You know just as well as we do that the last thing we want is a scandal, and you've got us on toast.

JACK STRAW.

Well browned on both sides.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

If you'll go quietly and at once we'll give you a couple of hundred pounds. There !

JACK STRAW.

Oh, this is a blow. To think that any one should be willing to give two hundred pounds to get rid of

me! And I've always flattered myself that I was such an agreeable guest in a country house.

VINCENT.

They have funny tastes in the servants' hall, I daresay.

JACK STRAW.

You have quite a knack of saying clever things, haven't you?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well?

JACK STRAW.

Madam, nothing will induce me to leave you till I have eradicated the unfortunate impression which I appear to have made on you.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Do you mean to say. . . .

PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Interrupting.*] Take care, mother. There's James.

The FOOTMAN enters with brandy and soda and glasses.

JACK STRAW.

Be a good fellow, Vincent, and mix it for me, will you?

VINCENT.

Certainly, sir.

JACK STRAW.

Where do you get your brandy, Mr. Jennings? I like it very much.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

It's very good of your Royal Highness to say so.
[*Exit* FOOTMAN.]

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, it's insufferable.

Enter the FOOTMAN *to announce.*

FOOTMAN.

Lady Wanley. Mr. Holland.
[*They enter. Exit* FOOTMAN]

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

There you are at last! This is a pretty kettle of fish.

VINCENT.

Mother, for heaven's sake don't be vulgar.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, I can't be refined now. If I'm vulgar, I can't 'elp it.

HOLLAND.

But what is the matter?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Good heavens, he's the matter. He won't go.

LADY WANLEY.

What!

JACK STRAW.

You know, it makes me feel very uncomfortable to hear you discussing me like this. Wouldn't you like me to retire?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

We've threatened him with the police.

HOLLAND.

Well?

PARKER-JENNINGS.

He just laughs at us.

VINCENT.

We've even demeaned ourselves by offering him money.

HOLLAND.

Of course he doesn't want your money.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well, 'adn't you better suggest what he does want?

HOLLAND.

Look here, Jack, you've made fools of the whole lot of us. Won't you be a brick and clear out? We really are in a dence of a scrape.

JACK STRAW.

I am always touched by an appeal to my better nature, but in this case I propose to steel myself against your entreaties.

HOLLAND.

Damn you!

JACK STRAW.

Don't lose your temper. You'll only say something foolish, and I shall score off you.

HOLLAND.

There's only one thing to do, and that is to turn you out by main force.

JACK STRAW.

That, strange as it may seem to you, has already been suggested, but I have explained to dear Mrs. Jennings the inconvenience of that course.

Enter the FOOTMAN.

FOOTMAN.

Mrs. Withers is in her motor, madam, and wishes to know if you can see her for a moment.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, I can see nobody.

JACK STRAW.

I hope you're not refusing to see her on my account, dear Mrs. Jennings.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Very affably, before the servant.*] Oh no, sir.

JACK STRAW.

I wonder if you'd very much mind her coming in. I thought her such a nice woman, I should like to see her again.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, of course, if your Royal Highness wishes it. . . .

JACK STRAW.

Thanks so much.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Show 'er in, James.

FOOTMAN.

Very good, madam.

[*Exit* FOOTMAN.]

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

My own 'ouse isn't my own now. I'm forced to see every one I don't want to. If there's any one I can't bear it's Fanny Withers. I only asked her yesterday because I thought she'd eat her 'eart out with jealousy. She's a snob if you like. I don't know what she wants to come here for at this hour. [*To* JACK STRAW.] Impostor! Impostor!

JACK STRAW.

You know, upon my word you're all very ungrateful. I lent an *éclat* to your party which has found lasting

fame in the columns of the local paper. I chatted cordially with the Duchess of St. Erth, I allowed the Bishop of Sheffield to tell me harrowing stories about the immorality of the very best people, and when Count what's his name. . . .

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Adrian von Bremer—you might trouble to remember the name of your own Ambassador.

JACK STRAW.

And when Count von Bremer came on the scene, and you were all at your wits' end, I carried the whole thing off in a way which only my native modesty prevents me from describing as superb.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

How he didn't find you out I don't know. I was on pins and needles all the time he was here.

Enter the FOOTMAN, followed by MRS. WITHERS.

FOOTMAN.

Mrs. Horton Withers.

[*Exit.*

MRS. WITHERS.

Oh, my dear, I had to pop in just to tell you how beautifully everything went off yesterday.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I'm glad our party had your approval.

JACK STRAW.

How do you do, Mrs. Withers?

MRS. WITHERS.

It's very good of your Royal Highness to remember me.

JACK STRAW.

It's one of the specialities of my profession, you know.

MRS. WITHERS.

Are you going to favour us much longer with your presence in the neighbourhood, sir?

JACK STRAW.

If Mrs. Jennings will keep me I don't propose to make an immediate move.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

My house is at your disposal, sir, as long as you choose to honour it.

JACK STRAW.

Mrs. Jennings is the most amiable hostess. Don't you think it would be nice if we took a turn in the garden, Mrs. Jennings? I'm sure Lady Wanley would like you to show her your roses.

LADY WANLEY.

Mrs. Jennings was good enough to show them to us yesterday.

JACK STRAW.

We have it on good authority that a thing of beauty is a joy for ever. Mr. Jennings will show them to you again to-day.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

I shall be very proud and 'appy to carry out your Royal Highness's wishes.

[JACK STRAW *stands at the door for* LADY WANLEY *and* PARKER-JENNINGS *to go out.*

JACK STRAW.

[*To* VINCENT.] Won't you come?

VINCENT.

Certainly, sir.

[*Mrs. WITHERS and* VINCENT *go out.*

JACK STRAW.

I will join you in one moment. By the way, where is your daughter?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

She's gone for a walk with Lord Serlo.

JACK STRAW.

Be so good as to tell her the moment she comes in that I should be very grateful if I could see her.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

. What about? .

JACK STRAW.

She'll doubtless be able to tell you that herself after our interview.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I'm not going to do anything of the kind.

JACK STRAW.

You will be so good as to do what I ask, Mrs. Jennings.

[*Exit.*

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

There, you see he actually orders me about now. I'm beginning to think we shall never get rid of him. I feel that he'll stay on here always. I can see him growing old under this roof, eating my food and drinking my wine, and sending in his tailor's bills for Jennings to pay. And it's all your doing.

HOLLAND.

I'm very sorry. I promise you that.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

What's the good of being sorry? The only thing you can do is to 'elp us to get rid of 'im. And it's ruined Ethel's chances with Serlo. He won't look at her now.

HOLLAND.

Well, I daresay that's not much loss.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I'm only thankful she wouldn't 'ave anything to do with that man when we thought 'e was an Archduke.

HOLLAND.

Do you know, if I were you I'd let her see him. I have an idea that when he's had a talk with her he'll be quite willing to go.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

What do you mean by that?

Enter ETHEL *and* LORD SERLO.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Very affably.*] Has Ethel been taking you for a walk, dear Lord Serlo?

SERLO.

Yes, we've been for a little stroll, don't you know.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I do 'ope she 'asn't tired you. She's such a walker, ain't you, my dear?

SERLO.

My idea of goin' for a walk is sitting on a gate, don't you know.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

And a very good idea too. That's just what I like myself.

SERLO.

[*Drily.*] Change in the wind to-day, isn't there ?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Innocently.*] Is there ? I didn't notice it.

[PARKER-JENNINGS *comes in frantically.*

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Maria, he's cutting all our prize roses for the show and giving them to Fannie Withers.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh !

[*She is just going to bolt out when JACK STRAW appears with a handful of magnificent roses.*

JACK STRAW.

I say, you haven't got a basket, have you ?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

You—you—you perfect fool !

JACK STRAW.

What have I done now ?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

We were going to show those next week at the Crystal Palace.

JACK STRAW.

I thought they were very nice. That's why it struck me Mrs. Withers might like them.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Snatching them from him.*] Oh!

[*She flounces out, followed by* PARKER-JENNINGS.

JACK STRAW.

[*Coming into the room calmly.*] I'm afraid I haven't done the right thing.

SERLO.

You've put your foot right in it this time, old man.

JACK STRAW.

I wish I had that little book of etiquette on me. I wonder if it says anything about prize roses. [*To Ethel.*] I haven't had the pleasure of saying good-morning to you yet.

SERLO.

You know, old man, I don't want to seem disagreeable, but when Miss Jennings and I went for a walk we had some sort of idea that by the time we came back you'd have hooked it, don't you know.

JACK STRAW.

My dear Holland, I wonder if you'd do me the service of telling Mrs. Withers that dear Mrs. Jennings is putting the roses into a basket for her.

HOLLAND.

[*Laughing against his will.*] It's not the least use being angry with you, Jack. I'll go by all means.

[*Exit.*

JACK STRAW.

There goes a man of tact. If I were a Sultan I'd make him my Grand Vizier.

[He looks reflectively, but very pointedly, at SERLO.]

SERLO.

What are you starin' at me for?

JACK STRAW.

I was wondering how I could suggest to you with proper delicacy that you might conveniently follow his example.

ETHEL.

I should much prefer Lord Serlo to stay here.

JACK STRAW.

I have matters of some importance to discuss with you.

ETHEL.

I am sure that you have nothing to say that Lord Serlo cannot hear.

JACK STRAW.

Very well, I will make an effort to overcome my customary modesty.

SERLO.

I don't know where that comes in. You've got about the biggest cheek that I've ever come across.

JACK STRAW.

To tell you the truth, it has been my only means of livelihood for the last four years.

ETHEL.

What have you to say to me?

JACK STRAW.

Couldn't you give me a slight smile just to encourage me a little?

ETHEL.

You force me to say what I would rather have left unsaid. I'm horrified that you should be so hatefully cruel. I think it's infamous that you should lend yourself to a stupid practical joke.

JACK STRAW.

My dear Serlo, won't you—hook it?

ETHEL.

I want him to stay.

JACK STRAW.

It makes him feel very uncomfortable. He's full of tact too—I'll make him a grand vizier—and he's feeling awfully *de trop*.

SERLO.

You needn't bother about my feelings so much as all that, you know.

JACK STRAW.

[*To Ethel.*] Won't you hear what I've got to say for myself? You don't think I care twopence about their practical joke? I came here because it was my only chance of seeing you.

ETHEL.

What you've done fills me with horror and disgust.

JACK STRAW.

Didn't you see from the first minute that I was desperately in love with you?

SERLO.

I say, this really is very awkward for me.

JACK STRAW.

You told me not to bother about your feelings.

ETHEL.

[*Unable to prevent a laugh.*] You know, you're too absurd. I know I ought to be very angry with you, but I can't.

JACK STRAW.

Do you remember what you said to me yesterday?

ETHEL.

No.

JACK STRAW.

Then I'll remind you. You asked me to go away—because I was a royal personage. Do you still want me to go if I'm only a waiter?

ETHEL.

I might have known that you were laughing at me all the time.

JACK STRAW.

You know, if I had been a royal personage and disguised myself as a waiter in order to be by your side you'd have thought it very romantic. Why should it shock you when it is a waiter who for the same reason assumes the royal personage?

ETHEL.

If you can't see the difference it's useless for me to tell you.

JACK STRAW.

Won't you marry me, Ethel?

SERLO.

I say, I've got a good mind to kick you out of the house.

JACK STRAW.

Have you? In that case I can only congratulate myself that I'm the champion amateur boxer in Pomerania.

SERLO.

That complicates matters a bit, don't it?

JACK STRAW.

Upon my soul, I've never made a proposal of marriage under such embarrassing circumstances. [To ETHEL.] Now, my dear, don't be unreasonable. You practically refused me yesterday because I was an Archduke. You're not going to refuse me now because I'm nobody in particular?

ETHEL.

[*Frigidly.*] And can you give me any reason why I should accept you?

JACK STRAW.

Well, it may have escaped your notice, but there's the very good reason that you're just as much in love with me as I am with you.

ETHEL.

I?

JACK STRAW.

Can you honestly deny it? But if you do I shall venture to disbelieve you.

ETHEL.

It's very easy to convince you. Lord Serlo, you were good enough to tell me yesterday that. . . .

[*She stops with a little tremor of hesitation.*]

SERLO.

By Jove, d'you mean it?

ETHEL.

[*Smiling.*] I mean anything you like.

SERLO.

[*With a low bow.*] Mr. Straw, I beg to announce to you my engagement with Miss Ethel Parker-Jennings.

JACK STRAW.

I'm still unconvinced. I'm afraid you're incorrigibly romantic, my dear, and I'm certain your mamma will be very much annoyed.

ETHEL.

Oh, you are too exasperating. I wish I could make you really angry.

HOLLAND *runs in*.

HOLLAND

I say, Jack, look out.

JACK STRAW

What's the matter?

Enter MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS, *much agitated, and*
PARKER-JENNINGS.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

The game's up. It's too late now to do anything.

HOLLAND.

Von Bremer has come again.

PARKER JENNINGS

And he's got some one with him in his motor, who looks suspiciously like a policeman in plain clothes.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

What's to be done? For 'eaven's sake, don't stand there grinning like a Cheshire cat.

ETHEL.

[*Quickly.*] You won't be arrested?

HOLLAND.

Look here, there's still time for you to get out.

Enter VINCENT.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Well?

VINCENT.

Lady Wanley's talking to him. She'll detain him as long as she can.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Blessings on her! I'll forgive 'er everything.

ETHEL.

Oh, please go while you have a chance. I couldn't bear to see you arrested.

JACK STRAW.

Why should you care?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Now, look here. You've played a nasty trick on me, but you've got the cheek of the devil. I don't want you to get into trouble. I don't know what there is about you, but I can't 'elp liking you.

JACK STRAW.

Madam, only the importunate presence of your lord and master prevents me from hurling myself at your feet.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, don't talk stuff. I want to 'elp you to get away.

JACK STRAW.

[*With a dramatic gesture.*] Madam, my mother's only son has never fled before a foe. I will stay and face the music.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I'm not thinking of myself now. If there is a scandal I'm rich enough to make people forget it.

SERLO.

I say, old man, you'd better hook it. England's no place for you just now.

ETHEL.

[*In an undertone.*] If you care for me at all, don't run this horrible risk.

JACK STRAW.

If you were only pressing me to stay this unanimity would be extremely flattering. }

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

The man's mad. The man's as mad as a March 'are. He ought to be shut up in a lunatic asylum.

JACK STRAW.

I forget if Napoleon was one of my ancestors, but I feel just like him at this moment. "J'y suis, j'y reste."

SERLO.

In point of fact it was MacMahon who said that.

JACK STRAW.

[*With a noble flourish.*] I prefer to think it was Napoleon.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

They're just strolling along.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Then it's too late. And it's all got to come out before Florrie Withers.

VINCENT.

[*From the window.*] I say, Lady Wanley is making him look at the roses.

HOLLAND

She is a brick ; she's gaining every moment she can.

JACK STRAW.

By the way, talking about roses, have you had that bunch put in a basket that I cut for Mrs. Withers?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS

Oh, I should like to take you by the neck and strangle you.

PARKER-JENNINGS.

Look out.

[*They all stop for a moment in a state of breathless expectation. LADY WANLEY comes in with MRS. WITHERS. She gasps as she sees JACK STRAW.*

LADY WANLEY

Oh, I thought you'd gone.

[*She is immediately followed by ADRIAN VON BREMER. JACK STRAW goes up to him very cordially.*

JACK STRAW.

Ah, my dear friend, I've been expecting you all the morning.

[*They all start. As the scene proceeds there is in every one increasing astonishment and perplexity.*

VON BREMER.

I couldn't come before. I have only just received the answer to my telegram.

JACK STRAW.

Have you good news for me?

VON BREMER.

The best. The Emperor agrees to all your wishes.

JACK STRAW.

Bless his old head.

VON BREMER.

His Majesty is all eagerness to see you again. He is expecting a letter from you by every post. [*He goes up to* ETHEL.] Madam, I am commanded by my august master to offer you his most cordial greeting.

ETHEL.

Me?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I don't know if I'm standing on my 'ead or my 'eels.

JACK STRAW.

Then nothing remains but for me to make my declaration in due form. Mrs. Jennings, I have my grandfather's permission to ask you for your daughter's hand in marriage.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*Breaking out.*] But the man's an impostor. He's no more the Archduke Sebastian than I am.

MRS. WITHERS.

What do you mean?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Oh, well, if you like you can 'ave it. You were there when it all started. I suppose I got out the wrong side of bed that morning, and when Mrs. Thing-a-magig, the Vicar's wife, come up to me at the Grand Babylon Hotel, I snubbed her. I've been very sorry for it since, and I've been punished for it. They knew I was an old snob—like you, Florrie—they

thought they'd pay me out. They got one of the waiters from the 'otel to dress up like a gentleman, and they introduced him as the Archduke Sebastian.

MRS. WITHERS.

[*Pointing to JACK STRAW.*] That ?

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Yes, that ! He's a waiter, that's what he is. And for the last week I've been making a perfect fool of myself over 'im.

VON BREMER.

[*Much mystified.*] But—I don't understand. I've known the Archduke Sebastian since he was born.

HOLLAND.

You're mistaken. This person and I were in America together. I lived with him for two years. I don't know his real name, but he passes under that of Jack Straw.

VON BREMER.

But what you say is absurd. I know him as well as my own son.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS

D'you mean to say he really is an Archduke ?

VON BREMER

Of course he is. The only mystery is how he turned up here when we've been hunting the whole world for the last four years to find him.

HOLLAND.

But are you the Jack Straw who was with me in the States ?

JACK STRAW.

Yes.

LADY WANLEY.

And are you the waiter of the Grand Babylon Hotel ?

JACK STRAW.

Yes.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

And are you the Archduke Sebastian of Pomcrania ?

JACK STRAW.

Yes.

SERLO.

Well, I'm jiggered.

JACK STRAW.

Perhaps you will allow me to explain. Four years ago I fell desperately in love with a lady whose speciality it was to kick higher than any one else in the world. She could kick a man's tall hat off his head with such grace that I asked her to marry me. My grandfather refused to consent, and the lady was hurried over the frontier. [*With a glance at ETHEL.*] I was a romantic dog myself in those days, and I followed her, only to find that she had already three more or less lawful husbands. The sight of them, and the conviction that her peculiar talent would not greatly add to the felicity of domestic life, cured me of my passion. But the world did seem a bit hollow and empty, and I

thought I'd see how it looked from the point of view of a man who had nothing but his wits to live on. After trying it, I tell you frankly that I much prefer living on the revenues which rise from the strength of arm of my ancestors. When you saw me at the Grand Babylon Hotel I was preparing to return to the bosom of my family, but I saw this young lady, and the chance offering, decided to come down here. It was not unnatural that when I was asked to assume a grandiloquent name I should assume my own. Yesterday, when I met Count von Bremer, I begged him to wire to the Emperor, asking for his consent to my marriage with Miss Ethel Jennings.

VON BREMER.

I have only to add that the Emperor, delighted with the prospect of seeing once more his favourite grandson, has gladly given his consent.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

And when I think of all the things I've called you these last few hours. . . .

JACK STRAW.

They went in at the ear of a waiter, Madaun, and slipped out at that of an Archduke.

[*He goes up to* ETHEL.

JACK STRAW.

And now it only rests with you to give peace to an aged Emperor, satisfaction to eighty-one Archdukes, and happiness to your unworthy servant.

ETHEL.

I am engaged to be married to Lord Serlo.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

What! I know nothing about this.

JACK STRAW.

I knew our mamma wouldn't be pleased

ETHEL.

The fact remains.

JACK STRAW.

[*Going to SERLO.*] Now, my dear friend, you've got the chance of a lifetime. It's quite clear to me that there's only one course open to you. Take the centre of the stage and renounce the lady with all the moving expressions you can think of.

SERLO.

Look here, old man, I don't think I quite like the way you keep on pulling my leg.

JACK STRAW.

Put a little dignity into it, man.

SERLO.

I may be a blithering ass, but I can see without your tellin' me that Ethel wouldn't have had me at any price if she hadn't wanted to score off you.

L

JACK STRAW.

Oh, how some men throw away their chances! Strike the pathetic note, old man, or you're done. When you've finished there oughtn't to be a dry eye in the place.

SERLO.

Well, the fact is—it had entirely slipped my memory at the moment, but I had a letter this morning from the lady's solicitor to remind me—I happen to be engaged to a young woman who can kick a man's topper off too.

JACK STRAW.

By Jove, I wonder if it's the same one.

ETHEL

Why didn't you tell me?

SERLO.

Well, you know, it was a bit awk when you—
er. . . .

JACK STRAW.

Threw yourself at his head.

ETHEL.

[*To Jack Straw with a smile.*] I ought to be very angry with you. You've laughed at me all the time.

I don't believe you'll ever take me seriously. If I really were the romantic creature you say I am, I'd be very dignified and refuse to have anything to do with you at all.

JACK STRAW.

But like all women you're very sensible at heart, and you'll do nothing of the kind.

ETHEL.

It's not because I'm sensible, but because I suppose you were quite right in what you said just now.

JACK STRAW.

Bless you! I'd throw myself down on the floor and implore you to walk on me only I'm convinced you'd take me at my word.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

[*With enormous satisfaction.*] I knew he was an Archduke all the time. You can't deceive a mother.

JACK STRAW.

[*With a start.*] There's one thing I must break to you at once. Pomerania is in some ways still a barbarous country. We have a dreadful law that when a member of the royal family marries a foreigner not of royal blood, his wife's relations are prohibited from entering it.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

I should like to see any one prohibit me from going to see my own daughter.

JACK STRAW.

My dear lady, it grieves me infinitely to say it, but no sooner had you crossed our frontier than you would be instantly beheaded.

MRS. PARKER-JENNINGS.

Truly, sir, a barbarous country.

THE END.

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